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At the firehouse table

Firefighters showcase culinary skills for charity and each other

See story on page 7

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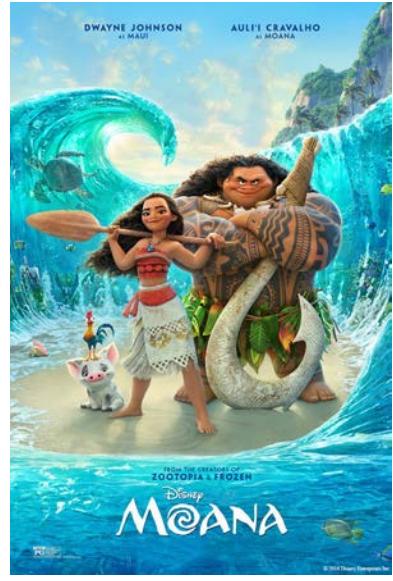
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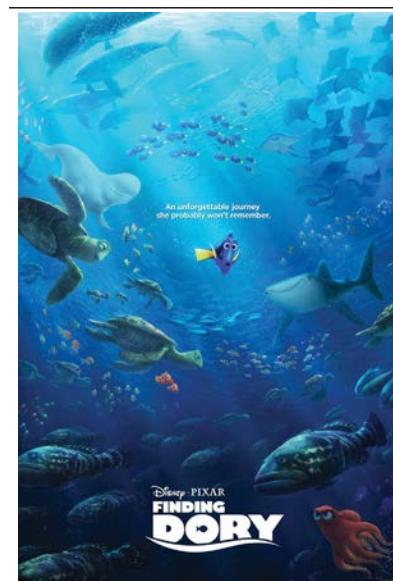
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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"It's just this kind of magical thing to feel that you've saved a life, or at least made a life much more bearable."— *Robin Gilmartin*

See story page 26

ON THE COVER

Firefighter Paramedic Lars Irvine, Capt. Steven Winter, Apparatus Operator Robert Howe, III and Firefighter Paramedic Jason Powers pose for a photo in Station 1 before enjoying a meal together. The tradition of "family dinners" is a common one in the firehouse and gives department members the chance to show off culinary skills.

Photo by Abigail Albair

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Photo by Todd Fairchild

Unified Theater

Celebrating 15 years of inclusive performing arts while looking to expand

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

During the 15th anniversary celebration Unified Theater alumni performed together again.

Conard and Hall high schools were recently guaranteed scholarships in perpetuity, which will enable Unified Theater at the schools to continue well into the future. Conard was the birthplace of this unique organization.

The scholarship announcement was part of the anniversary celebration, which took place in June. There was an enormous cake at the party recognizing this milestone and alumni of the theater kept up the tradition of singing "We are Unified." The song, written by a student leader, has always been performed following each performance of the group.

Now 15 years after it was founded, the theater is looking to the next 15 year with plans of expansion.

"Now we are hoping by the end of 2032 we have a Unified Theater program everywhere for everyone, which was Micaela's vision from the start," said Laura McLellan, chief executive officer.

Micaela Connery, who at the age of 15 while a student at Conard High School, founded the program. Her special needs cousin inspired her and the theater was founded as a way to include students of all abilities.

"We've grown up and learned from all of our programs here in Connecticut," McLellan said. "We feel we are prepared to launch into the stratosphere."

According to its mission, "Unified theater dissolves typical barriers between youth and puts the spotlight on ability through transformative, school-based performing arts programming. At Unified Theater, young people with and without disabilities, of all backgrounds, come together as equals to put on a production. The production is entirely organized, written and directed by the students themselves."

By the time Connery graduated from college in 2009, Unified Theater

had access in all types of schools, inclusion across all barriers, and scalable impact. I couldn't be more hopeful about the future from here out for Unified Theater. I'm so grateful for all Laura and the board and team do to continue the impact."

There are Unified Theater programs in more than 50 schools throughout the state and almost 70 throughout the country, said McLellan, who joined the organization four years ago.

"Unified Theater's vision is a world where inclusion is real. We respect, value and embrace people of all abilities, and differences no longer define us."

-Micaela Connery

had grown to seven schools in town. Following her college graduation Connery decided to focus on expanding the theater as her full-time job. She stepped down from the organization in 2014 and currently serves in an advisory capacity.

"It's hard to believe it's been 15 years," Connery said. "One of the things I'm proudest of is how the organization has continued to stay true to our founding principles of inclusion, youth leadership, and complete, unadulterated creativity. Still while retaining those, Unified Theater has evolved in focusing on

"On any given weekend we have a Unified Theater program at some school across the state of Connecticut," McLellan said. "We had two this week," she said during a telephone interview in mid-June.

Each school or community that organizes a program makes it their own, she said.

As the nonprofit works to expand, the West Hartford community will always hold a special place in the heart of the theater.

"We always say how much we love and value the West Hartford

community," McLellan said. "West Hartford is really special not just because the leadership for the history and the schools saw something special in what Micaela did 15 years ago, they have really been there for Unified Theater for the last 15 years."

At this time, Connery is completing an MBA program in Dublin, Ireland and has plans to move to San Francisco when she returns to the States. She will be starting an organization called The Kelsey, named after her cousin, which is a housing development accommodating a mix of people – those with developmental disabilities and those without. Connery is a graduate of the Kennedy School for Public Policy at Harvard University where she studied inclusion policy with a focus on housing.

"Her entrepreneurial spirit came out in this school-based solution," McLellan said of Connery. "Now that they are growing up, Micaela is continuing to see challenges around inclusion with adults with disabilities. She will be applying her brilliant brain towards inclusive housing for adults with disabilities."

Connery, who spoke with West Hartford LIFE via email, said she will not forget her start with Unified Theater.

"I still have some favorite

memories – our first show, obviously; the spring tours; sitting in the audience and watching a new Spotlight School's inaugural production; staff meetings as our team grew; seeing our student participants and leaders grow up in Unified Theater over many years; getting some of our first big grants and donations," she said.

"Unified Theater's vision is a world where inclusion is real. We respect, value and embrace people of all abilities, and differences no longer define us. And I think it's 100 percent the case that that vision is embraced by and internalized in the students who participate, and the audience members," Connery said. "Now more than ever we need leaders who value diversity and who believe in collective success and inclusive leadership. I feel so hopeful that alumni of Unified Theater will become those kinds of leaders. They already are in schools, and companies, and courtrooms, and communities. They learned values and behaviors in Unified Theater that they use to make the world better long into the future."

One of those individuals is Brendan

McKay, who joined Unified Theater in his junior year at Conard in 2002. It was the second year the program existed. Today McKay serves on the Unified Theater board.

"I knew a bunch of the participants, [both] students with and without disabilities, from both Conard and my time as a lifeguard at the public pools interacting with the summer campers," McKay said.

"Never being one to want to be on the big stage for the real high school theater productions, I saw Unified as a way to have a ton of fun expressing myself while

Unified Theater, Inc.
is an inclusive performance group founded by a former Conard High School student.

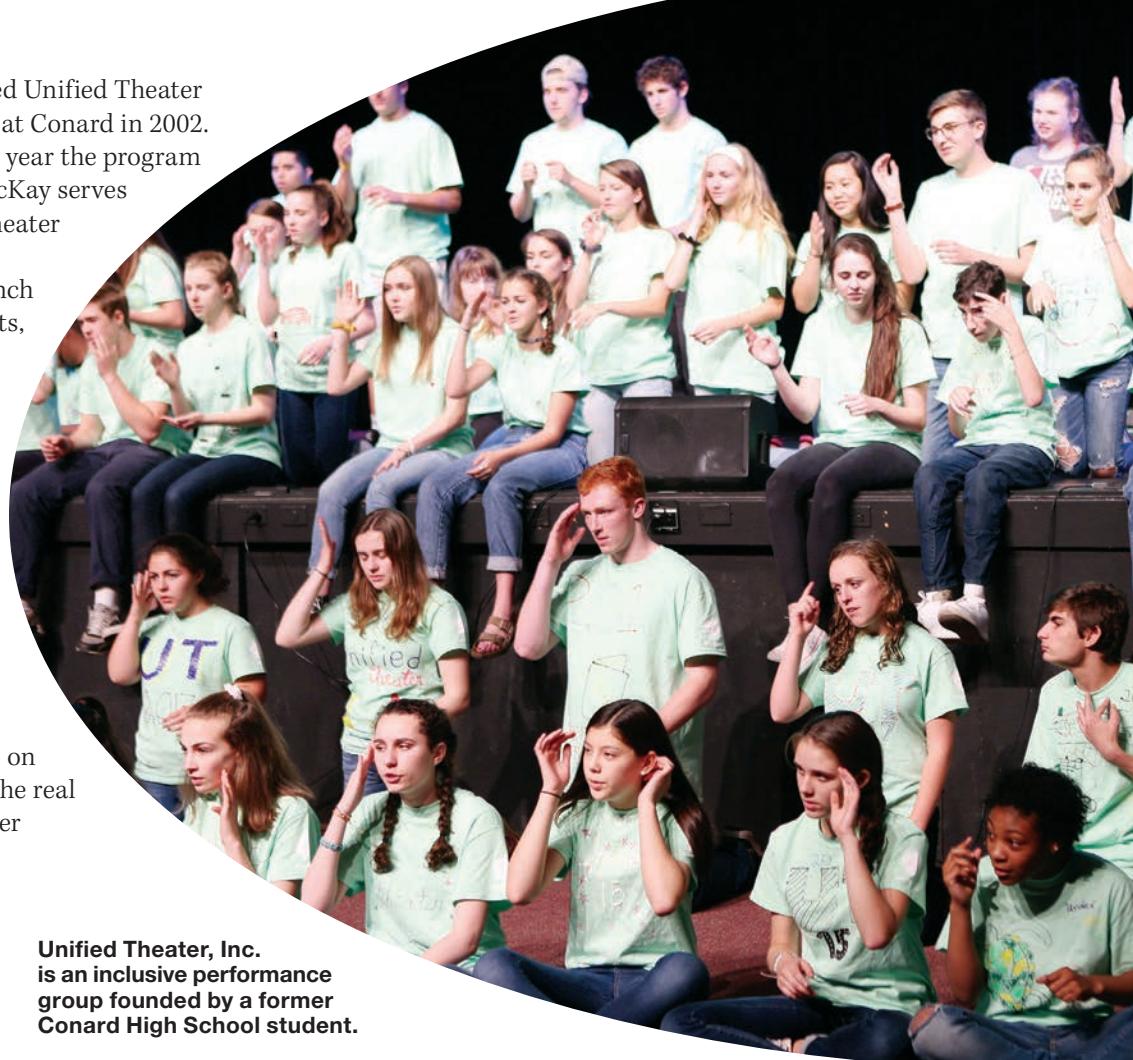


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Photo by Todd Fairchild

The 15th anniversary celebration featured a large cake.

"We've grown up and learned from all of our programs here in Connecticut."

We feel we are prepared to launch into the stratosphere."

-Laura McLellan

meeting new people and getting to hang out with kids that I didn't have a chance to during the school day.

"As a student, it was really special and eye opening to see firsthand that regardless of someone's creative – in the case of myself – physical or mental abilities, every participant had something to offer to the show. I can still remember our practices in the Conard cafeteria and our final show at the Park Road Playhouse and what a thrill it was when the lights went down and the actors rushed out onto the stage for

the first scene."

McKay was inspired to join the board, he said, because he believes in the organization's mission.

"I see firsthand how much adults struggle to find ways to interact with those that are different than them, not necessarily because they don't care but because they have had limited experiences with others that have disabilities," he said. "By creating a program and space for students to interact with those around them, with limited boundaries and

social rules in place, our kids mature with the belief that while people are different, all differences should be respected and that everyone has something to offer. If more adults had that foundation, I think the world would be a much kinder and more inclusive place."

This summer the theater will be offering their program at Camp Courant and will be working with the YMCA in Newport, Rhode Island.

"The wonderful thing about Unified Theater is every year we get to see the magic of the program happen all over again," McLellan said.

Students who are interested

in the program often join in the middle school and continue with the theater through high school. Typically students produce a show every spring, however Conard and Hall high schools have added a fall show, too.

Despite having put on shows for the past 15 years, each performance brings a new sense of excitement among the participants.

"It's fun to come back at the beginning of the school year and we have a whole new group of students who learn the history and really come to understand what the whole of our young people do," McLellan said. "Regardless of your disability or ability everyone has something wonderful to bring to the table." **WHL**

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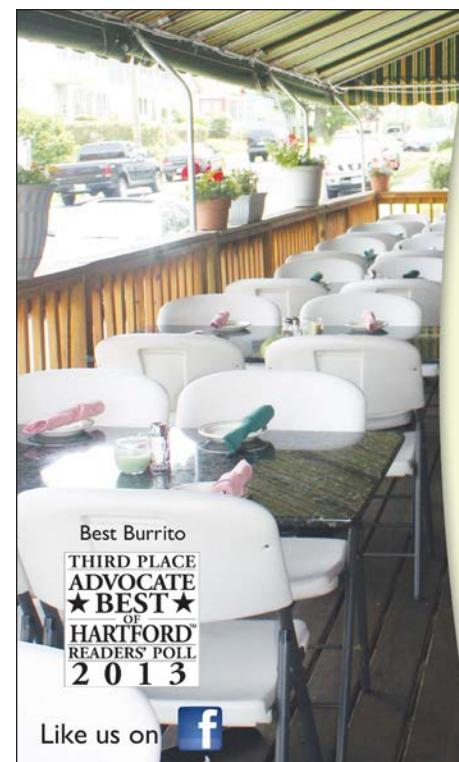
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Fighting fire, breaking bread

Cooking together helps keep fire department team strong

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

It is said that few things are more impactful on a family unit than sitting down together for a meal.

This is something members of the West Hartford Fire Department know all too well.

"They talk about the breakdown of the American family and how nobody sits down and has dinner anymore. We do that here," Capt. Steve Winter of Station 1 on Prospect Avenue said.

He and his team, including Firefighter Paramedic Jason Powers, Apparatus Operator Robert Howe III and firefighter Ryan Shea make meals together a regular occurrence.

"The four of us that are here now, we just go around the table every night and one of us cooks or buys food and we take turns. One of us is always responsible for feeding the others," Winter said.

Because the station is a second home to firefighters who work

10-hour day shifts and 14-hour overnight shifts, food is just naturally part of the equation.

"An overtime in-between stretches one shift into three," Winter said. "[It's] about an average workweek compressed into a day and a half, usually with little rest. Calories become a surrogate for actual sleep."

If there is enough of a pause between calls – which can sometimes include constant medical calls since the department took over the town's paramedic service last August – they gather around the firehouse table to break bread and enjoy each other as friends.

While the familial aspect is nice, it's also an opportunity for this eclectic mix of some amateur chefs and some culinary wizards to show off their skills.

Howe, who is this year's firefighter of the year, competes in barbecue competitions with the



Firefighter Paramedic Jason Powers, Apparatus Operator Robert Howe III and Capt. Steven Winter gather around the firehouse table for dinner after returning from a medical call. Howe and Winter are pictured above in their truck on the way to that call.

town of East Hartford's Fire Chief John Oates.

"John used to be a battalion chief here and we started messing around with the smoker. One day he had a competition in Southwick, Mass. that came up and he asked me if I wanted to do it with him. We took first place the first time we tried," Howe recalled. "After that, we kind of had to defend the title. We do

three to four competitions a year."

Battalion Chief Bill Kall has also begun to dabble in the world of smoked meats.

Current department Assistant Chief Mike Sinsigalli used to have a cooking show on West Hartford Community Television. Lt. Adam Pacheco was a chef at Carbone's in Hartford before becoming a firefighter. Retired Lt. Chris Conlon now

Photos by Abigail Albair



Firefighter Paramedic Jason Powers, the “master chef” of Station 1, seasons burgers as he prepares dinner for his fellow firefighters. He made a modified version of the Slow Burn Burger firefighter of the year Robert Howe III designed for a celebrity competition.

owns a Southington restaurant called Smokin’ with Chris.

Every year, the firefighters run a grill and beer tasting to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association. They also annually showcase their cooking talents at a fundraiser for Comprehensive Women’s Health Center at Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center held by West Hartford resident Barbara Gordon.

“They are the most amazing group of guys,” Gordon said in an article that appeared in last month’s West Hartford LIFE in advance of this year’s party. “They say, ‘Don’t worry about a thing.’ They come in, they take over the kitchen, they cook the most incredible food you have ever eaten and they are just wonderful, wonderful guys, and they give us a donation on top of it, so I can’t say enough about the West Hartford Fire Department.”

The theme this year was diversity and the menu featured ethnic foods.

Powers was the master chef behind the operation.

“I grew up in a fire department and my grandfather’s statement was, ‘If you don’t know how to cook, don’t be here,’ ” Powers said. “I’m a big fusion guy. I like to take everything, mix it up and make something new. Food is a good bonding experience.”

Crews at the town’s five stations face off annually in a cooking competition at the senior center, which they take quite seriously.

“I do the dishes,” Winter joked regarding mealtime at the firehouse. “All my other shifts I used to be the good cook. With these guys I’m not.”

Still, his salmon with mango salsa goes over well with the other firefighters.

Lt. Jeff Dufresne, who works opposite shifts at Station 1 from Winter and his crew, is also big on cooking for his fellow firefighters. When he prepares meals, he’ll often invite police officers to join.

“We work together on a lot of calls. It’s quick. We go in, we take care of a victim that’s sick or injured, and we don’t talk to each other,” he said. “They’ll come to the firehouse when I call them and sit down to have a little time together rather than just being out on an emergency. We have a quick bite and just talk. They’re only there for 20 minutes,

“I grew up in a fire department and my grandfather’s statement was, ‘If you don’t know how to cook, don’t be here,’ ”

-Jason Powers

but that little bit goes a long way.”

What Dufresne cooks often depends on the season, with comfort food such as soups and buffalo chicken sandwiches gracing their plates in the wintertime.

“At nighttime, if it’s quiet, we’ll make a chicken parmesan,” he said, noting that he’ll swap in vegetables for pasta to limit carbohydrates and keep the meal healthy.

The job of cooking fell to Dufresne after he took first place in a chili cook-off at the senior center.

“The guys said, ‘You’re the chili champion, you can make dinner,’ ” he said with a laugh.

It is a role he happily took on.

Growing up in a large family as the oldest sibling, Dufresne would often make dinner before his parents came home from work to

have it ready and on the table when they arrived.

“If I wasn’t a fireman I’d probably be a chef somewhere,” he said.

Shea and Powers both served abroad in the military – in the Marines and Navy, respectively – and like to incorporate flavors from other cultures into their cooking.

“Everybody learns from everybody,” Shea said. “I was stationed in Japan and chicken curry was one of my favorite meals over there.”

Powers said he was used to cooking for fellow soldiers in the Navy, and working in the firehouse is a similar lifestyle.

“It’s a seamless transition from there to working hand in hand with these guys: cooking, feeding, cleaning, sleeping, breathing,” he said.

Winter noted that making a meal is a good way to break the ice.

“When you’re really new on the job and people don’t know you yet, if you can cook, it’s a great way to buy some street credibility,” he said.

Howe used his celebrity status as firefighter of the year, along with his grill skills, to work with the chef at Plan B Burger Bar to design a menu item for National Burger Month in May.

The Burger and Beer Community Combo-tition invited “foodie celebrities” to create a burger and beer par-

Green Blaze.

“I’m into spicy food, so I thought something like a habanero aioli,” Howe said of his initial concept.

Powers pointed out that something sweet was needed to balance the heat, which is where the pineapple came in.

On a recent Wednesday evening, Powers came in on a night off to make dinner for the guys – a variation of the Slow Burn Burger wrapped in bacon and topped with cheddar cheese, paired with salad that featured chick peas, black beans, avocado and feta cheese.

Firefighter Paramedic Edward “Teddy” Dombraskas was in for Powers that night while Firefighter Paramedic Lars Irvine was in for Shea.

As Powers flipped burgers on the grill, the tones rang out and the crew on shift climbed into the truck and rode away to a medical call. Dombraskas traveled with his patient from that call to Connecticut Children’s Medical Center, while the rest of the team returned to the station and took a few minutes to enjoy the food before heading out again to retrieve their paramedic from the hospital.

To be sure he wasn’t left out, they packaged up a plate for Dombraskas and had it ready in the truck when he climbed into his seat.

Taking time to have dinner together when the job allows is something that keeps the family dynamic of the fire department strong, Winter said.

He reminisced about some of the meals he’d had over the years: “Capt. Ken Roback’s tuna melts, firefighter Jim Goggin’s chicken cacciatore ... Battalion Chief Jim Quish’s seven bean salad, marking the paradigm shift to being healthier in our vocation,” he said, noting the tradition of group meals when department members work holidays and the time Lt. Mike O’Donnell deep-fried a Christmas ham in the bay of Station 2.

“Food really brings everybody together,” Shea said. “It’s the classic: ‘Let’s break bread together.’ ”

Dufresne agreed that, particularly because the firefighters live together much of the time, mealtime is crucial to the dynamic.

The job can be hectic, to be certain. He had just come off a 36-hour shift in which he handled 22 calls.

“It’s important to keep that togetherness in the kitchen,” he said. “That’s where a lot of problems are solved.” **WHL**

News roundup

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor

Town says goodbye to Van Winkle

The town of West Hartford bid a fond farewell to Town Manager Ron Van Winkle May 30 in preparation for his retirement at the end of June.

The evening was emceed by former Town Manager Barry Feldman, former Director of Community Services Rob Rowson and town corporation counsel Patrick Alair.

"If the town of West Hartford were to choose a favorite son, Ron would be chief among them," Rowson said at the beginning of the presentation.

Alair noted the fact that, of all his projects, Van Winkle is proudest of his two sons.

Mayor Shari Cantor lauded Van Winkle for his sense of humor, humility, loyalty and work ethic.

She presented him with two proclamations, one from the governor's office and one from the General Assembly.

Highlighting the event was a video presentation featuring Town Council members, colleagues and friends sharing kind words and a few jokes about the lifelong West Hartford resident and public servant.

Feldman, along with others, praised Van Winkle's wife, Ruth, and the strength of the couple's partnership. He called Van Winkle "remarkable, unique and capable," and said the word that most comes to mind about him is "trust."

Van Winkle was born in West Hartford and grew up in town. He left for a short time during his collegiate years, but returned home and soon took a job at UTC building econometric models for Pratt & Whitney.

He worked as the commissioner of Economic Development for the state of Connecticut under Gov. Ella Grasso and opened his own consulting business before being hired by the town as director of community services in 1987. He was appointed town manager in 2008.

Van Winkle has been involved in many projects over the years, including the development of Blue Back Square, the Veterans Memorial and Bristow Middle School.

He thanked the taxpayers for their support and confidence and said, "I've been lucky enough to work for a great town and become its town manager. It has been an honor for me."

Van Winkle's last Town Council meeting was held June 27. For coverage, see the July 6 edition of The West Hartford Press.

For a profile of the town's incoming town manager, see next month's edition.

Bees now permitted

The Town Council unanimously approved an ordinance June 13 to permit the keeping of honeybees in town.

The discussion of beekeeping came about when a resident complained about his neighbor's hive after he was stung. Town Planner Todd Dumais explained in an introduction abuzz with bee puns. Because town ordinances were until now silent on bees, and because zoning is a permissive regulation, that means silence inherently prohibits the activity.

The ordinance allows the keeping of one or more colonies of domestic honeybee – depending on lot size – as an accessory use. One hive is permitted in the R-6 zone, two in the R-10, R-13 and R-20 zones, three hives in the R-40 zone and four in the R-80 zone. Applicants will pay a one-time fee of \$135 and, during the 30 days the application is under review, the applicant must place signage on their property indicating that a Planning and Zoning application is pending.

"A lot of that was driven out of potential safety concerns for people who have allergies to bees," Dumais said.

Recycling now weekly

Beginning July 1, recycling will be collected weekly rather than on the current biweekly system. Collection will be on the same day as regular trash collection. The goal of the town's recycling program is to increase the volume of material in the blue recycling bin as opposed to the green trash barrel.

The town was able to make the change due to a renegotiation of its contract with Paine's for waste management.

The new contract offers an "aggressive pricing scheme," Director of Public Works John Phillips said, "making it fiscally responsible to happen this year."

The net cost to go to weekly recycling will range from \$125,000 to \$175,000, Phillips said. The town earns approximately \$5 per ton for recycling and pays \$66 per ton for waste disposal, so each ton recycled rather than trashed results in a savings of \$71.

"It's all about revenue we'll receive from recycling," Phillips said. "The challenge to the residents is we really need to recycle good quality material and keep contaminants out. It's in everybody's best interest to learn about recycling. The goal is to increase volume but make sure it's as top quality material as possible." **WHL**



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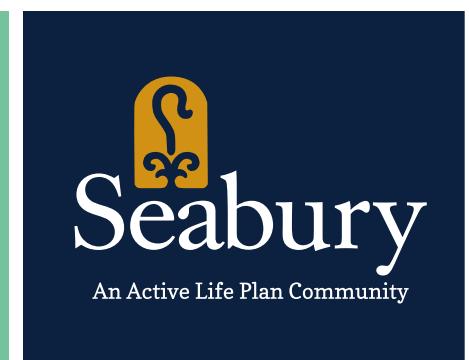
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Volpe Monument Company celebrates 55th anniversary

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor



A young Michelle Volpe-Trudeau would put on a dress, buckle up her Mary Janes and head out of her home with her father to sit quietly while her dad conducted business, talking to clients in the privacy of their homes.

It was on these outings Volpe-Trudeau learned an important component of what would eventually become her life's work. She learned compassion, empathy, diplomacy and more. Back in the office she would learn from her father drawing, drafting and design.

Volpe-Trudeau had intended to become a police officer, however, for the past 27 years she has been working in the family business, Volpe Monument Company, which this year is celebrating its 55th anniversary, and she could not imagine doing anything else.

"This is me," she said. "I am very passionate about what I do."

Her father, Damian, an engineer, began the business out of their West Hartford home and her mother, Suse, came on board as the bookkeeper. After five years the business bought a small house as an office at 81 Reed Street. The property, a corner lot, included a small side yard, which was perfect for setting up examples of monuments and markers, and through the years has often been mistaken for a small cemetery.

Volpe-Trudeau can remember when the paneling in the business office was installed. Not much has changed, although she now uses a computer for what she calls the boring part of the job – the bookkeeping – that her mother had done at a typewriter.

As a child she would accompany her father on some of his appointments. When she was older she worked at the business during the summer and on school breaks. When her mother became

ill, Volpe-Trudeau was married and had a son; she came to help in the office two days a week which soon stretched to three as her mother became more ill, passing away at age 57.

"I didn't want to leave," Volpe-Trudeau said.

Her father thought about selling the business but first asked his daughter if she wanted to learn how to design and cut monuments along with the careful art of assisting people deep in grief.

"My father was a really gentle soul," Volpe-Trudeau said. "He was low key, quiet. I've seen men comfortable enough to cry in front of him. To this day I have people call me and say 'I remember your father; he was so nice.'"

Her father has since passed away, but his influence can still be felt.

"He taught me that listening to people and personalization, the smallest symbol or the way you have written the wording can be so important," Volpe-Trudeau said.

"I spend as much time with people as they need," she said.

Like her father, she has developed a gentle way of speaking with her clients and drawing out from them information about their loved one, a delicate and sometimes difficult but necessary conversation.

It helps Volpe-Trudeau to know about the loved one, their likes, what they were passionate about, what they might want the world to know about them. Details, such as a nickname, or a music instrument they played can be important information.

For one family she added an engraving of an accordion on the stone, a reflection of the loved one's passion and the family could not have been more pleased, telling her that each time they visited the cemetery they saw the accordion and it brought back great memories of holiday gatherings when

they would sing and the accordion came out to accompany them.

Having these conversations did not come easily to Volpe-Trudeau who was often in awe of her father and his apparent natural ability to converse comfortably through an emotionally charged situation. He would ask a widow how she had met her husband or ask family members how their loved one passed away.

Her father's advice to her was to ask the questions and she would come to learn whether or not the family was open to answering.

She also helps them through the entire process, from when they step into her office to order a stone, to the day it is erected in the cemetery, a process that can take from six weeks to six months. Through each step she keeps the families apprised of the progress.

Often clients are in a difficult emotional state at the time she is working with them and many have never had to purchase a stone for the cemetery before.

"The hardest part about it is having someone tell me what they are thinking," Volpe-Trudeau said, adding that often people are unaware that they have more free rein for what is put on the stone, which can extend beyond the basics of names and dates.

She also helps families through the financial component of purchasing a stone or marker, which can be an additional, unexpected expense.

"Monuments can be expensive. It's a luxury item; you are not required to have one," she said.

Additionally, cemeteries have regulations that can govern the size and color of a monument, and in some instances, the information put on the stone. In some cases Volpe-Trudeau has had to go through the cemetery board or superintendent to have a design approved. She has often been successful in these instances.

Photo by Alicia B. Smith

Some families are ready to get the process started immediately following a death while for others it can take months or even years before they are ready. Sometimes this is because people feel they have had no control over the situation.

"They've had no option up to this point," she said. "My approach is to give them as much knowledge and control of the situation."

She also encourages families to consider adding more information on a stone, such as maiden names or nicknames.

"It's knowing about your relations and history, where you came from, that connection," she said.

When a family comes in to her office, or when she makes visits to their home, they will discuss the steps that need to be taken care of everything from design ideas to information to be engraved to cost.

Volpe-Trudeau will then go back to her office and begin to sketch ideas based on what she has learned from the family. When she feels she has a design she thinks the family would like, she will share it. Once approved, Volpe-Trudeau finalizes the design,



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

"Stone is permanent, it doesn't change. I like that. It's always going to be there."

-Michelle Volpe-Trudeau

right down to the letter sizing, and sends it off to the stone carvers. She works with a small group of subcontractors who assist with installation. She also makes occasional visits to the granite companies she uses to learn more about the work they do and who is responsible for doing it. All of the carving work is done by hand while other aspects, such as polishing and sanding the stone, are done

by machines.

Volpe-Trudeau learned about different types of stone from her father: how each reacts to the elements and what an imperfection looks like. Since she was a child by his side, she has always liked stone – the cool feel of it and the different colors.

She also developed a liking for different types of rocks.

"I guess I've always been

attracted to it and finally stopped fighting it," she said of her line of work. "Stone is permanent, it doesn't change. I like that. It's always going to be there."

Today Volpe-Trudeau lives in the house she grew up in, along with her husband and their dog. She attended Webster Hill, Sedgwick and Conard schools.

In addition to tagging along with her father to meet with families, Volpe-Trudeau would also visit cemeteries with him. One of her favorite parts about going to work with her dad was when he would allow her to take rubbings off a gravestone. Her father would be there, in a suit, while her fingers would get covered in black from the charcoal she used.

"It's wonderful because I can't imagine doing anything else," she said.

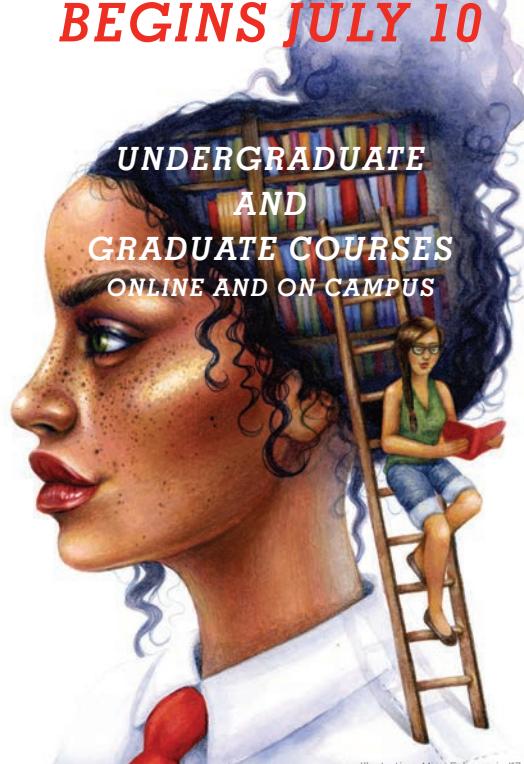
What Volpe-Trudeau has come to learn about life from this job is to take nothing for granted.

"Tell your family and friends each time they call that you love them," she said. "We should all take the time to smell the roses, it's really important to appreciate everything. Be grateful." **WHL**

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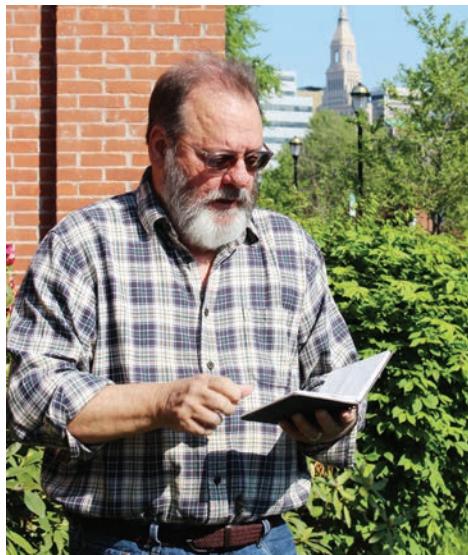
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Photos by Alicia B. Smith

Walking back in time

Stephen Thornton offers tours of Hartford's grassroots people and places

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

Walking down the street one day in Hartford, Stephen Thornton looked up and noticed a plaque on the side of a building noting that former presidential candidate Stephen A. Douglas, of the famed Lincoln-Douglas debates, had given a campaign speech on the site in 1860.

Thornton would later learn that another famous Douglas, this time Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, had also spoken in Hartford, had his photograph taken in the city and had one of his books published here, too.

"The fact is wherever we stand there is history, just if we have the gumption to find out," Thornton said.

Thornton has spent much of his free time finding out more about local history, going so far as to create walking tours of Hartford, developing a website to share some of the information he has found and writing books.

"I am not a historian, an academic or a writer. I have just enough skills to put something like this together," he said.

Thornton moved to Hartford in 1973 and soon found himself looking around at other things besides plaques on buildings.

"Little by little I was doing research," Thornton said about Hartford. "I was finding out Abraham Lincoln spoke here, or someone

draped a cloth over a statue after the execution of John Brown."

After collecting enough information, Thornton noticed it formed a circle through the downtown part of the city.

"I decided, just for fun and my own education, I realized there could be some significant stories," he said.

Thornton continued his research. Much of the information he discovered was about local people, most of whom were not well known.

Eventually he was asked by a friend to give a tour for a nonprofit group. That first tour, which he planned about 10 years ago, focused on the area around the Old State House.

When others heard about it, they asked to have the tour, too.

Thornton was aware that there had been a radical walking tour in New York City, featuring some of the city's agitator residents. He was never able to take the tour himself, but Thornton was inspired by its message.

When his downtown tour ran its course, Thornton turned his attention to other parts of the city.

He worked on Charter Oak Avenue and it occurred to him one day, this was a street with a Polish Club – one that happened to serve great kielbasa; his office was located on this street and there were two homeless shelters there, too. What other stories could this street tell?

From his own curiosity,

Thornton went on to learn that there had been a horseshoe nail factory, the Capewell Nail Factory, on Charter Oak Avenue that burned to the ground in 1903. The women workers were asked to sift through the ash looking for any nails that could be salvaged. The women were not paid for this as their boss determined that what they were doing was not work but rather "cleaning."

The neighborhood had once been heavily Polish and later Puerto Rican, he also learned.

"I surprised myself and found very important history," Thornton said.

The Charter Oak Avenue tour was the second he organized.

Thornton lived in Hartford for 40 years where he worked as an organizer with the healthcare union District 1199/SEIU.

Throughout his life he organized protests and other activities focused on the Vietnam War, racism, housing rights and the homeless as well as helping develop a third political party, People for Change, which elected city council members. He also worked with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and the list goes on.

"As a city I really love it," Thornton said of the capital. "I take it personally when people are fearful or revolted by the city because they don't have any sense of how many different parts there are to it, how many different neighborhoods each with

their own characteristics."

"What the city is is people," Thornton said, such as Isabella Mendes Blake, a Hartford resident and activist for the poor. In 1971 she organized a 16-day tent city at the State Capitol in an effort to get state legislatures to not cut welfare. She was arrested during the protest.

"She's a hero of mine," Thornton said.

Another such person is Butch Lewis, a Hartford resident and member of the Black Panthers, Hartford Chapter. Thornton knew about him vaguely, and learned more when he researched the FBI's files.

"There were about 300 pages, lots of redactions," Thornton said.

Lewis was instrumental in working with a group of moms who lived in Charter Oak Terrace, a public housing development in the North End of Hartford. The Park River (also known as the Hog River) ran through the property, and when the water rose, there were a few children who had drowned. The mothers were protesting, asking the city to help make the river safer. Lewis helped the mothers in forming a blockade on Flatbush Avenue. It caught the attention of city officials who were motivated to find a solution to a blockage downriver that was causing the river to run higher than normal.

Thornton has a website, shoeleatherhistoryproject.com, where he writes more about the people and places in Hartford to keep

its history alive.

Some of his other writings include his self-published book, "A Shoeleather History of the Wobblies: Stories of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in Connecticut," which focuses on the men and women working in industry during the early part of the 20th century and their efforts to improve their working conditions and lives.

For this book, Thornton interviewed a number of family members impacted by the Wobblies' work.

"Finding this stuff is the first satisfying part," Thornton said. "The second satisfying part is the thrilling, heartbreaking and dramatic and almost always they are stories of courage, groups swimming against the tide."

Since the book was published Thornton has found more stories of Wobblies and intends to include them in the book's second printing.

Thornton spends time at area libraries – both in Connecticut and out of state – as well as looking at primary sources and books to learn more about his beloved Hartford.

"I scour what has already been written about the city and put it side by side with what I think I know. That discernment process I take really seriously. I want to make sure the facts are absolutely correct.

"Finally, fortunately, I am writing about stuff I was involved in 40 to 50 years ago and that is history," he said. "I leave myself out of it, but I know the players."

Thornton has also contributed stories to the Arcadia Press' series of books looking at the dark, underbelly of cities, which often focus on murders and other nefarious activity. Thornton opted not to dig deep into this part of Hartford's history, looking instead into stories that were not positive, but had some good outcomes.

For instance, there is the story of Virginia Thrall Smith, a wealthy woman who lost her money when her husband gambled away their fortune. She was the mother of two sons. With her finances in such dire straits, Smith took a job, quite an unusual action for a woman in the 1870s. She went on to become the head of social services for the City of Hartford and began the first kindergarten, created the first credit union for women and helped to foster a system of trade among workers. She was later accused of "baby farming," a derogatory term of the day that referred to placing orphan children with families until a permanent home could be found for them. It was the precursor to the foster care system. Smith went on to found the Smith Home for

Incurables, a home for sick children, in 1898 in Newington. The home went on to become the Connecticut Children's Medical Center.

Other notables that Thornton is also researching are Sam Colt, Morgan Bulkley and Horace Bushnell "because there is always a good side to the sordid great white man side to history."

Thornton, now retired, moved to West Hartford a few months ago to be closer to his wife's family. His interest in Hartford, however, has not waned.

"One, I think people, once they hear, people in Hartford can take some pride in their history, and two, I think it puts a human face on the city," he said of what, in part, keeps him motivated to continue his research.

In addition to his tours and books, Thornton often works with students at Trinity College, helping them with their own research and introducing them to local history.

"I want them to get used to living in the city and meeting people. It's such a wonderful, rich community of human experiences," Thornton said.

During one of his many jobs Thornton taught classes for those who had been homeless, through a program run by the Charter Oak Cultural Center. He created a series

**"The fact is,
wherever we
stand there
is history."**

-Stephen Thornton

of postcards of some of the people he has researched to share with his students. Each card has a photo of the individual and on the back is information about them and a quote. Among some of the individuals on the cards are suffragist Edna Purtell, abolitionist John Brown and activist Eugene Victor Debs.

One of the things that Thornton keeps close by is a small black notebook. Here he writes down the names and dates of individuals and events so he has them handy. He also keeps track of things he learns or wants to learn more about.

"When they say Hartford is so boring, what they mean is downtown doesn't have a great weekend," Thornton said.

Through his work he has proven that Hartford history is far from boring if people just have the gumption to find it. **WHL**



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Courtesy photos



Steve and Nick Balkun perform at Infinity Music Hall. Dinosaurs joined them on stage for the encore and – like their heroes Jimi Hendrix and Kurt Cobain – Steve smashed his guitar in honor of the CD release.

Balkun Brothers

Bringing their music to the world

by Lynn Woike
Editor

Big brother was watching. Mark Balkun looked on as his younger brothers Steve and Nick performed at their album release party at Infinity Music Hall June 17. The two began making music together in a 10-by-12-foot room with brick walls in the basement of their West Hartford family home seven years ago. Now they have taken the music they created there to the world.

In addition to touring extensively in the United States, the band has also completed three European tours since 2015, performing in Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and France.

“Devil on TV,” with nine songs, is their fourth album, but only the second as a duo. It is the first, they said, that sounds “like we really sound right now.”

That sound is a mix of gritty, heavy rock and funk with traditional

styles of Delta and electric blues – and it’s theirs alone.

On stage as well as in studio, the brothers transition seamlessly from rock to blues to funk, jam, punk and psychedelia – and everything in-between.

Their high-energy music has been influenced by Jack White, Motörhead, Buddy Guy, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughn, Primus, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Muddy Waters, The Doors and Led Zeppelin, among others.

Known for explosive live shows, the Balkun Brothers received high honors at the 2017 New England Music Awards April 30, winning Best Rock Band in New England.

Appearing at Infinity with them were Jake Kulak and the LowDown, who were a nominee by NEMA for New Act of The Year.

The Balkun Brothers were also voted the Best Blues Band in Connecticut at the Connecticut Music Awards for the last four years, 2013-16.

“We used to jam down here, just the two of us,” Steve said during an interview in the basement. “It’s kind of how we started and we’ve always been doing it, but we’ve always kind of thought you needed to have a bass player or another guitar player. ... We had a saxophone player for a while. We had two guitars and a bass player, so we’ve tried all different combos.”

Becoming a duo happened more or less by default when their bass player quit.

“We wanted him to stay, and we actually tried out another guy and it didn’t work out,” Steve said.

“Right when that happened, we got [the] offer to get signed in Europe and they liked the idea of us performing as a duo,” Nick said. “They thought it was a cool concept for two brothers to be playing.”

Just as there were different versions of the band, there were different versions of music. They’d play funk rock as the Three Wheeled Fonk Cirkis and blues under the name Balkun Brothers Blues Band.

Starting out with funk rock, for four of the last six years, they’d been a straight-up blues band a majority of the time.

“We would do whatever they

wanted,” Nick said.

Old-school blues. Quiet background jazz. Dance music. Heavy metal. Rock and roll.

It was confusing, they said, adding that they did not want to be known just as a blues band so that was eventually dropped from their name.

Their first sold-out shows were at the University of Connecticut where Nick earned degrees in finance and psychology.

They played several shows there with Poor Old Shine, now Parsonsfield, who also has musicians from West Hartford.

“I went to Berklee for a little while in Boston,” Steve said, adding that, while he was there, “I just played with tons of people. I got picked up by a band when I was 19 and toured around with them for a while and then started my own group up there and Nick used to come up to Boston and see me play all the time.”

“I roadied for a while,” Nick said, “and learned the ins and outs of everything, and played with a lot of guys who were way better than I was.”

“I never thought that I was going to be in a band with anybody,” he said.

Slowly, though, the brothers began playing tunes together, then writing songs together.

When Nick was playing drums with a friend who played bass, Steve agreed to join them as "a side thing" to his other bands.

"We didn't take it seriously at all. Especially me and our bass player," Nick said, and they disbanded when the bass player went to medical school and Steve moved to Georgia to learn how to make and repair guitars from a master builder.

"That was our first big road trip together," Nick said. "We thought that was ... incredible and now we do that every weekend, no problem."

Steve returned to West Hartford a certified luthier, having graduated top in his class, and opened Balkun Guitars, a custom shop in the basement of their home on Farmington Avenue.

He made his own instruments and did daily repairing for a steady stream of customers – some of whom came in with a design sketched on a napkin.

The space is on the other side of the wall from his father's machine-packed woodworking shop, which he said helps when it comes to cutting planks and shaping wood.

"I know all the ins and outs of the instrument now, so I can make my instruments play like I want them to," Steve said.

"They've all had their time on stage," he said of the guitars hanging on the walls.

A flourish carved into each peg head is his signature.

The most rewarding thing about the art of making an instrument from scratch, Steve said, "is finally stringing it up and plugging it in and hitting the first chord and seeing what it sounds like."

Each guitar sounds different. Where he used to bring five to a show, now he's learned how to do everything he wants on just two.

Their father, who plays guitar, would take them to the open jams at Black-Eyed Sally's. He's been on stage with them a couple of times there and at The Pine Loft.

"I learned a lot of stuff down there," said Steve, who began going when he was 16. "They'd let you play and let you sit in. So, all these older guys there that played there all the time ... showed me a lot of stuff. That was a big musical education down at the blues jams at Black-Eyed Sally's."

From jamming to hosting and then playing sold-out shows, the brothers shaped their music there. Occasionally, they still show up for one of the Wednesday night sessions.

"That was like our first dream come true, to actually host the jam," Nick said.

They also played in Blue Back Square, and for the University of Connecticut bar crowd in Storrs.

Steve recalled, "We have a whole set of cover music that we play. We're sort of used to doing bar gigs when we were coming up and we'd have to play for three hours for those UConn shows."

The brothers – who are two years apart in age – attended St. Timothy Middle School and then Northwest Catholic High School. It was in high school each began playing, around the time they turned 16.



Each took some lessons, but the power duo said they were largely self-taught. Now they also give lessons.

For the most part, everything they perform is original music.

"We have two covers on our new album, but that's the first time that we've done covers like that," Nick said.

"Devil on TV" was recorded in Nick's studio in his home in Windsor, where he lives around the corner from Steve.

It was released May 30 by Dixiefrog Records, a blues label based in France. While it distributes their music across Europe, the brothers are promoting it by touring. Steve provides the art; Nick makes the videos and engineers the studio recording.

"ReDrova" was the first album the brothers independently produced and recorded in West Hartford. It made it to #1 on the Roots Music Report Blues-Rock album chart. Their second full-length album, "Balkun Brothers," was recorded at a studio in New York City.

"After that, we sort of said we could do this ourselves and get the sound we're hearing in our heads," Nick said.

Steve is called Saint Slide by their "label guy," while Nick is called Professor Hammer.

Downsizing to a duo, both agreed, was the best business decision they ever



Courtesy photos

Nick and Steve Balkun record music in the entrance of their parents' West Hartford home.

made – they no longer had to pay a third person or deal with musicians quitting.

They also admit to "more or less" getting along.

They spend time together just about every day.

"We just do a lot of jamming," Steve said. "We just drink some espresso, go down into the basement and see what happens."

Sometimes there will also be whiskey.

Their collaborative style has them yelling things at each other, feeling their way through the music, going off a title, a lyric or a riff. They record hundreds of jams.

"After we record these spontaneous experiments, we will select our favorites and then organize the sections and sequences of the actual songs. We can start a song in many ways, but we try to put our favorite parts together and discuss what works and what doesn't for that particular groove or song. It takes many months to finalize a song sometimes and others will be written and completed on stage in less than five minutes," Steve said.

Sounds from their travels – including an accordion in Amsterdam and a police siren in Paris – also make it into songs during the magic of production.

They still set up their equipment at their family home in West Hartford, playing as loud as they like when no one else is home. Already they've recorded three songs for a future album there.

The two travel to 150-200 performances a year. Sometimes their parents, Nick's wife or Steve's girlfriend will come. Their travel rituals include

listening to a lot of Motörhead and Jimi Hendrix on the drives, staying at Red Roof Inns, eating breakfast at Cracker Barrel, and tooting their horn each time they leave a state.

On stage their style is to keep it relaxed and simple. While some artists don't like people coming up to the stage, the Balkun Brothers embrace it.

"People come up and play the harmonica or they breakdance or they air guitar," Steve said, recalling one guy who had a flute in a bar and just started walking down the aisle toward them.

They told a story about one rainy night in the middle of nowhere in West Virginia and how, when no one came, the sound guy left. Then, two guys from L.A. showed up. One of them had a harmonica, and the brothers invited him up on stage; the three of them jammed for that guy's friend.

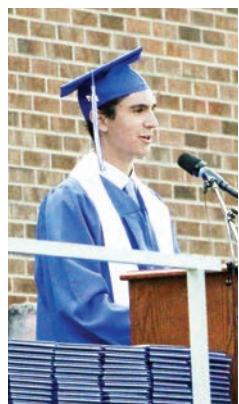
In March, when the duo was making their inaugural appearance in L.A., a man walked in wearing a Balkun Brothers T-shirt. He was the friend who was the audience of one that rainy night in West Virginia.

Another story they tell is how one of their favorite but yet-to-be-named songs was created on stage as they performed one of their biggest shows in Times Square.

"On the spot," they said of the song coming to be. "Just feeling it. Go for it. Came up with a groove, came up with a lyric. ... We play it all the time now."

Their advice to other musicians is: "If you keep working hard at something long enough and you believe in it, you can do it. ... Eventually you'll be successful." **WHL**

kids Voices



Hall High School

Ethan Hixson was the high school's 2017 graduation speaker. Below is an excerpt of his remarks.

Hey everyone. So this is pretty cool. We're gonna get a piece of paper. But not just any piece of paper. We're going to get a piece of paper with a signature on it. A signature that says, "You. Yes! You! You did this! You walked the long road and here you go! This piece of paper is now yours. Now go! Go into the big pond and show everyone with your little fish hands the piece of paper you were given! Flaunt it! Because it's yours!" Great, right? Now what?

Now is when it all starts. We didn't just finish a chapter, we just got through the prologue.

Chapter One, Page One. Titled: Out of the Frying Pan...and into of the Fire. Obviously you're not going to get burned to death. This isn't a campfire and you sir or madam are not a marshmallow. This is the world. And you are ready.

... It's easy to walk out of here with that piece of paper and say "I learned nothing useful," however that's not true.

... I learned that "The Odyssey" isn't really that good, but Shakespeare is. I learned that a black box is much better than a black board, and that chicken soup isn't really good for the

soul (but a trip to the great outdoors is). I learned how not to write an essay in five paragraphs and how to have confidence in all aspects of my life.

... You might not have learned much from chemistry, you might have hated pre-calc, and let's be honest who had fun on the SAT? But regardless of what classes you passed and which ones you failed, you learned something. This school, like it or not, had a hand in making who you are, and it gave to you skills that are much more valuable than what the answer is to question 36 on your Ap Econ exam.

So, when they hand you that coveted piece of paper, the one with a signature on it, don't look at it as a trash compacted version of your transcript, look at it as personified proof of who you have become.

Conard High School

Emmanuel Adelani and Andre Lavado Costa were the Conard High School graduation speakers. Below are excerpts of their remarks.



Adelani

In "Pioneers! O Pioneers!" Walt Whitman proclaimed that "We the youthful sinewy race, all the rest on us depend." Never has this held truer than now. It seems as if the whole world around us is in shambles. Citizens around the world are oppressed by a smothering blanket of censorship and injustice. Shadows are cast over their very existence, yet amongst these shadows there is a light.

That is the youth. It is up to us to shape the world as we see fit.

... Parents as I am sure you know, you need to work hard in order to achieve your goals. This is something that you have taught us from the time we were born, with the hope that one day our motivation to work hard would come from within instead of from you. That day is quickly approaching and you have done so much to help us prepare for what is to come, that I now ask of you to let us use the skills you have given us to make our own decisions and inevitably make our own mistakes.

... Guy Ritchie, a wildly rich and successful director once said, "Don't get serious until you're 25." While I can't say I recommend this, I like the reminder to not take ourselves too seriously. There suddenly seems to be a huge rush to grow up, but we are just getting started. As 18 year olds, we sometimes forget this. ... Despite the challenges ahead, I can confidently say that each one of us has the potential for success. My peers and I, we are resilient. Weeks of chasing each other with water guns at all hours during assassins last year proved that. We are also full of ideas and passion.

... We owe this largely to the Conard community that we come from. Our teachers have looked out for us, come in early to offer extra help, and made our opinions feel valued. Our coaches have believed in us and taught us to push ourselves. ...

I have also been influenced positively by my peers in front of me. ... I will truly miss the comfort of your familiar faces in the hallways.

In conclusion, as eager as some of us are to move forward and never look back, don't forget your roots as a Chieftain.



Lavado Costa

It wasn't so long ago when we were doing simple arithmetic, and now we're finding the area under a curve. It wasn't so long ago when we were finger painting, and now we're making sculptures and advanced paintings. Think about it, our lives have changed dramatically since elementary school and even middle school. ... I think we're the best group of students to come through Conard. It's the intangible stuff that really makes us a great class. ... Tomorrow, no one will care about how many AP classes we took in the future. No one will ask about our ACT scores, or even worse, our SAT scores. ... All of these things seemed to be ultimate factors in our success at the time, but they are trivialities at best. What we will remember is all of the experiences that we've had with others. I remember everyone coming together to tackle the beasts that were AP exams. I remember there always being someone willing to give me a spare T-shirt if I forgot mine for gym. More importantly, I can say that at my time in Conard, I have never witnessed a case of bullying. Our differences didn't build borders between us, and that's a fantastic thing.

... Classmates, Listen to yourself, because you will always be there if others aren't. Follow your passions and the possibility of failure. Try new things until you find one that makes you happy, and bring along the special people in life who have always supported you. In the end, it's the most positive experiences that we remember when we're looking back. **WHL**

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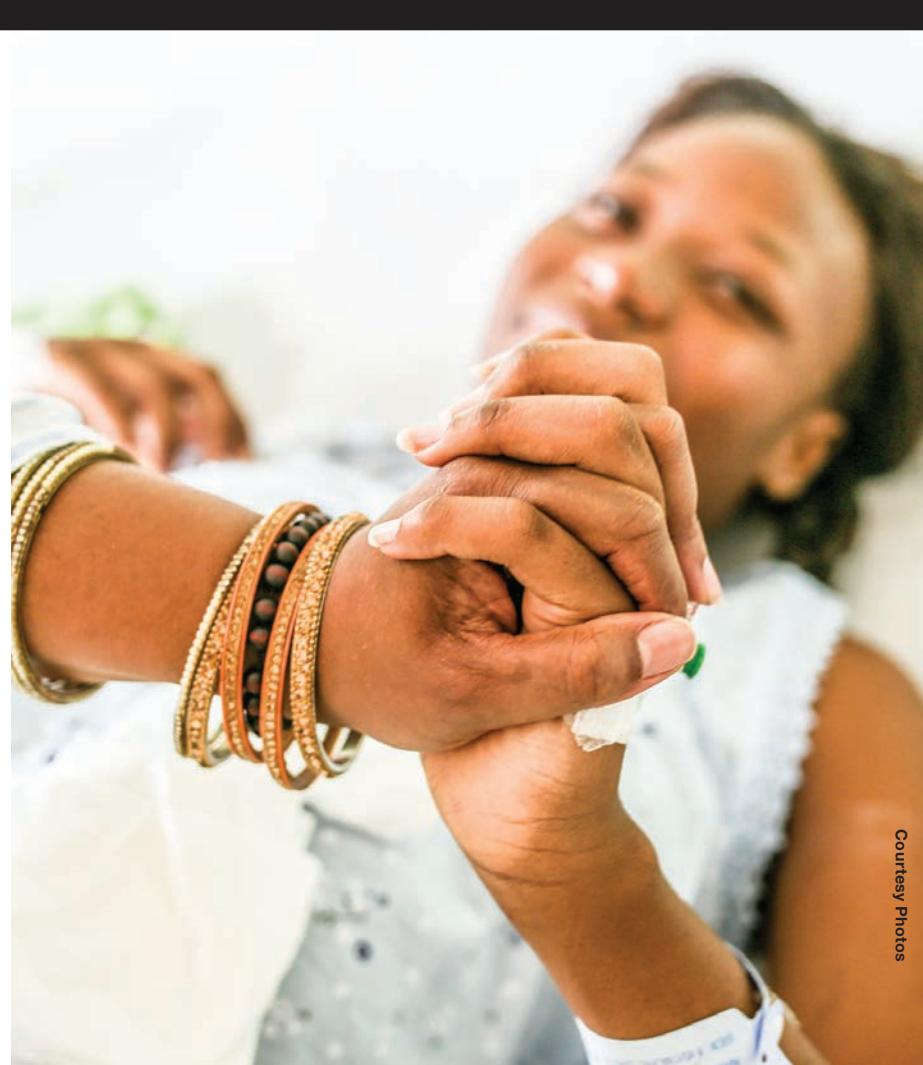
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Courtesy Photos

Medical missions

Duncan Tree Foundation helps children one surgery at a time

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

Dr. Mark C. Lee and his friend Peter Safer traveled to the Philippines in March, a first for both. The work they did in Davao City and at Tebow CURE Hospital, however, is not unfamiliar.

Lee, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon at Connecticut Children's Medical Center, met Safer, an account manager with Medtronic, a company that provides medical devices, a few years ago. Since that time they have traveled to Jamaica multiple times, spending about a week and a half at two different hospitals.

Lee performed surgery on children to improve their spines and Safer provided the medical devices needed to make drastic change.

The trip's goal is to provide spine deformity care to children

who would not get it," Lee said.

The majority of their time is spent meeting patients and in the operating room, with very little time to relax on the beach.

Lee, who has been practicing for nine years, was introduced to the Duncan Tree Foundation, a nonprofit organization that fundraises to provide free spine surgeries to children in developing countries through a fellow orthopedic surgeon. Ouida Duncan, who came up with the idea after a personal health scare, began the foundation. Duncan was born in Jamaica and immigrated to this country in 1974. In 2012, the Duncan Tree Foundation developed the Scoliosis Care Fund, which has since become a prominent part of what the foundation does.

According to the foundation's website, there are 300 children in Jamaica who have been diagnosed

with spine-related issues and are waiting for corrective surgery.

A trip out of the States includes packing all the necessary supplies and having two or three surgeons, nurses, staff to monitor patients during the surgery and representatives from Medtronic. The individuals work as a team; nurses assist the surgeons performing the operations, and the representatives organize the equipment.

In Jamaica, the team works at the Cornwall Regional Hospital in Montego Bay where they perform four to five surgeries before traveling four hours to the 300-year-old Kingston Public Hospital where they work on about 10 cases.

Lee said they work with local surgeons trained in spine care but who may not have the resources to do the necessary surgeries.

The days are long, he said, often beginning at 8 a.m. and not wrap-

ping up to until 10 or 11 p.m.

Safer's company provides the hardware that is inserted in a patient's spine during these surgeries. This could be rods and screws.

"We work with the Duncan Tree Foundation to get this equipment into the country," said Safer, a West Hartford resident. "We provide all the hardware, we use biologic products which help bone to grow."

Before each trip Safer will organize all the small parts he brings with him.

Lee travels with a small collection of instruments, saying, "For me there is not a lot of prep. This is the stuff I do day in and day out."

Prior to each trip, Lee receives some information on the patients – age, gender and sometimes X-rays – so that he knows the issues and can determine how to help them.

"When we get there we do a thorough patient prep," he said,

"I grew up in Third World conditions; I knew I would go back. Doing this type of surgery is food for the soul."

-Dr. Mark Lee

talking with them and their families.

"There are curve balls in each trip," said Lee, a resident of Farmington, adding that sometimes a patient may have other health issues in addition to a spine disorder.

"I always felt I should give back," Lee said about what motivated him to get involved with the Duncan Tree Foundation.

Lee was born in China and came to this country when he was 5.

"I grew up in Third World conditions; I knew I would go

back," he said. "Doing this type of surgery is food for the soul."

Safer is happy to "be a part of this amazing opportunity."

He got satisfaction seeing some of the patients who had been operated on during previous trips and who were now healed.

"You can't do this in a vacuum," Lee said.

A component of these trips is instructing the local team of physicians about the work they do and follow-up care that the patients may need.

"They do a lot of lectures," Safer said of the team. "They teach the local physicians and staff about the procedures."

Lee said, "You are really pampered in the U.S." where people take the level of technology available for granted. On the road, he added, "you need to be more resourceful."

"I get quite a bit of enjoyment out of it," Lee said. **WHL**

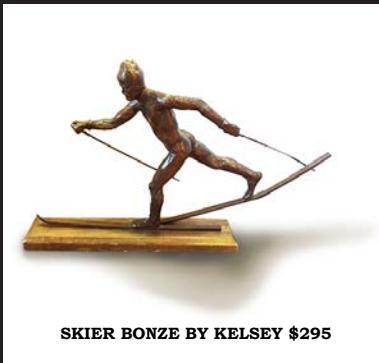
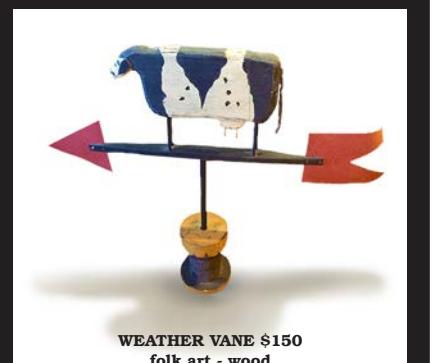
For more information on the Duncan Tree Foundation visit duncantreefoundation.org.

Dr. Mark Lee and Peter Safer volunteer with the Duncan Tree Foundation.



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

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Giving new meaning to the senior grind

Local KO grad and his friend started a successful coffee shop

by Nancy Thompson and Lynn Woike
LIFE Staff

Kingswood Oxford friends Ryan Clifford of West Hartford and Jack Antico of Glastonbury both wanted to start a business. Ryan, who is passionate about coffee, had an espresso machine. Although Jack doesn't drink it, he did notice many trendy coffee places on the Georgetown University campus when he visited his brother.

Putting the two together added up to KO on the Grind – a gourmet coffee shop on the school's campus that served as a hands-on entrepreneurship 101 experience for the two seniors who have since graduated.

They wrote a business plan and submitted it to school administrators who asked for more information, which the two youths provided. The café opened in the spring, only a

couple of months before they were to graduate, and while they were dealing with all the normal senior year activities, responsibilities and stress. By the time the school year ended, they had eight employees and were training two sophomores to continue the business when school reopens.

They made lattes, cappuccinos and espresso to order, using an espresso machine and grinding the beans themselves.

"No one ever ordered drip coffee from us," Jack said. "Lots of kids never drank coffee before. We urged them to try it, and we never had anyone try anything they didn't like."

Ryan started drinking coffee in the sixth grade.

"It sounds like a really young age to start, but I'm really sluggish in the morning so it was a big game changer. I like coffee for many reasons.



Photo by Jacqueline Pisani

Jack Antico (left) and Ryan Clifford started a successful coffee shop at Kingswood Oxford School before graduating in June. Both will study business in college.

It makes me a lot nicer in the morning, it keeps me up during the day, and I really like the taste if it's done right. My favorite type of coffee would be a well-made dark roast black coffee," he said.

Jack baked the brownies, blondies, and muffins in the family's oven. He credited his mother with teaching him how to bake and giving him recipes.

The two increased their hours and added a service that for 50 cents would deliver orders anywhere on campus.

For his part, Ryan said he liked the experience and learned a lot from it.

"Jack and I just wanted to start a business ... and try to make some money. We thought about selling

clothing, but there was already a school store for that and we didn't want to create competition. Coffee just seemed to make the most sense, and it turned out to be a great decision," Ryan stated, replying to a series of questions by email.

"I enjoyed the experience as a whole to be honest. I learned so much so quickly, and got such a great response from everyone," he said. "Although it sounds cheesy, there was really nothing better than seeing a satisfied customer. KO was also really supportive of the business, which was really awesome... These people took time out of their busy day to talk and go over our plans, the rent we would pay them, etc., so Jack and I could have this experience. We are both so grateful for that."

He acknowledged that the business was challenging to set up because they both knew it would be a short-term project.

"Jack and I started this in the end of our second semester in our senior year. It was difficult trying to adjust to that, because we could only buy in so much bulk. We didn't want to have a ton of supplies left over by the end of the year, as it would be a waste of money. Not only did that mean constant shopping trips, but it also meant decreased profit margins because it would have been cheaper to buy in bulk, but like I said, that wasn't an option for us. It was also really annoying, because just as the year was ending, we were really starting to make money and hire more people. I think it would have been interesting to see how far we could have actually taken this, but either way, it was an excellent learning experience."

Ryan said he plans to work in the family's commercial construction business, BRD Builders of Hartford, eventually taking it over when his father, Mike, retires.

"I have always wanted to go into the business since I was a little kid, and it has been the topic of many conversations I have had with my father. Hearing about his daily experiences in all aspects of the business has always fascinated me. For the past several years I've worked there during summer vacations. Each year, my father has me working different jobs in the business. I started at the bottom with a broom in my hand, but as I get older I am handed more challenging roles. I have been given



Photo by Jacqueline Pisani

"Although it sounds cheesy, there was really nothing better than seeing a satisfied customer."

-Ryan Clifford

many different responsibilities, from negotiating with vendors to supervising a small group of laborers. This allows me to learn as much as I can about each aspect of the business, so I can have a good understanding of how everything works. I am confident that this will prove to be very useful to me further down the road."

The lessons he learned with the coffee venture will also be transferable, he said.

"By hiring employees, I've become much better at delegating. By determining the weekly rent we would pay the school for the space we used, I've gotten much better at negotiating. I've also learned the importance of utilizing new technology in business. We wanted to be able to accept credit and debit cards as payment, so I researched and bought a card reader from Square – I had seen it being used in many small businesses. Not only did this increase our sales, but with the

Square app, we were also provided with graphs that compared sales from the week prior, peak hours, and other valuable information. I also learned the importance of customer satisfaction and reputation, along with effective marketing techniques."

The experience was better than anything that would have been taught in a classroom, said Ryan, who admitted he didn't want to wait for college to start a business.

In addition to praising his father's "incredible work ethic," he modeled it, working "incredibly hard to make it successful and to become profitable."

He said, "It was almost like I had to prove something to myself. I wanted to break even before the school year ended, and ... we got it done in just weeks. ... The reality of it was, we were learning as we were going."

Both young entrepreneurs

With a passion for coffee and an espresso machine, Ryan Clifford began KO on the Grind with a friend and fellow senior.

impressed school officials with the way they went about starting their business and its success.

"In navigating the process of creating this coffee shop, I was particularly impressed with the fact that both Ryan and Jack stuck with the project in the midst of the spring of their senior year – a time when most are enjoying the run to graduation," said Natalie Demers, associate head of school. "We asked them to do student surveys to assess the viability of a coffee shop and we asked them for a business plan. They were thoughtful, thorough and professional in all they did."

"What stood out to me about Ryan was that he was very productive. I don't mean productive in the traditional sense of getting things done in a set amount of time. I mean coming to meetings having produced something to move the conversation and the creation of the business forward," such as a floor plan, itemized costs and how they expected to cover those costs, said Dean of Students Will Gilyard.

Ryan will attend Bentley University this fall where he plans to major in management. **WHL**

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Upping the heat in the kitchen

86'D chef battles bring restaurants, community together

by Allie Rivera
Staff Writer

The dining area of Zohara Mediterranean Kitchen rapidly filled with people. Tables and chairs were pushed to the side as speakers blasted upbeat music and samples of Lord Hobo Brewing Company beer were passed out, the waiting crowd growing increasingly more excited. At first glance, the scene seemed reminiscent of a New York City club, but as the clock drew closer to 10 p.m., all attention on that Monday evening was turned toward the kitchen on Farmington Avenue in West Hartford.

"We sold over 200 tickets, plus whatever walk-ins we get," said Kristen Fritz, co-owner of Eat IN Connecticut and organizer of the event.

The crowd was gathered for the

sixth round in a series called 86'D, a live chef competition that began in February. Chefs have 45 minutes to create two to five dishes using provided ingredients as spectators and judges look on.

"We've had 16 chefs battle this year," Fritz said. "They get to bring one ingredient each, but then they have to cook with mystery ingredients they find out about that night."

Mystery is a large part of the event's appeal and nearly every aspect of 86'D is kept secret. The location is revealed three days ahead and even the chefs competing are selected the day of the event.

"We literally just pull the names out of a hat," Fritz said.

The competition began when Fritz and her co-owner, Jeannette Dardenne, were approached by Scott Miller of DORO Restaurant Group with the idea.



Photos by Allie Rivera

As soon as the competition began, owner and chef of the Rooster Company in Newington KC Ward began preparing his ingredients. He was named the winner.

"Scott Miller came to us with this and wanted to do it, but they knew they couldn't execute it on their own," Dardenne said.

Eat IN Connecticut, Fritz and Dardenne's West Hartford-based business, is a marketing and communications firm that works with local restaurants, and upon hearing about the idea of a competition between local chefs, the two women were thrilled to get involved.

"The whole idea of this was to have a fun competition and bring the community together," Fritz said.

Through hosting these competitions, the two entrepreneurs said that local residents can get a chance to witness and experience the talented chefs in the area.

"This is also a way to recognize what goes on in the kitchen," Dardenne said. "People don't always understand the skill needed to be a chef."

On the evening of May 15, the two competitors were KC Ward, chef and owner of Rooster Company in Newington, and David Awad, chef at Present Company in Tariffville.

"This 45 minutes is going to be like a busy Friday or Saturday night," Awad said with a small laugh before the competition began.

"I just can't wait to see what the three ingredients are," Ward added.

As the chefs took the time to get to know the kitchen at Zohara, another chef sat back with a drink and reminisced on his own experience competing in an earlier round.

"It was super fun, but it was intense," Eric Stagl, owner of Yardbird and Company food truck in Hartford said. "Once you start, the time just flew by."

During his competition, Stagl was tasked to cook with Muscovy duck breasts, parrotfish and aged balsamic. Knowing that two more chefs were preparing to compete at the time, Stagl offered some advice.

"Keep it simple," he said. "Don't stress too bad about it because we're amongst friends here."

In addition to the talented chefs stepping up to battle, each competitor also brought with them a bartender to compete in a cocktail competition.

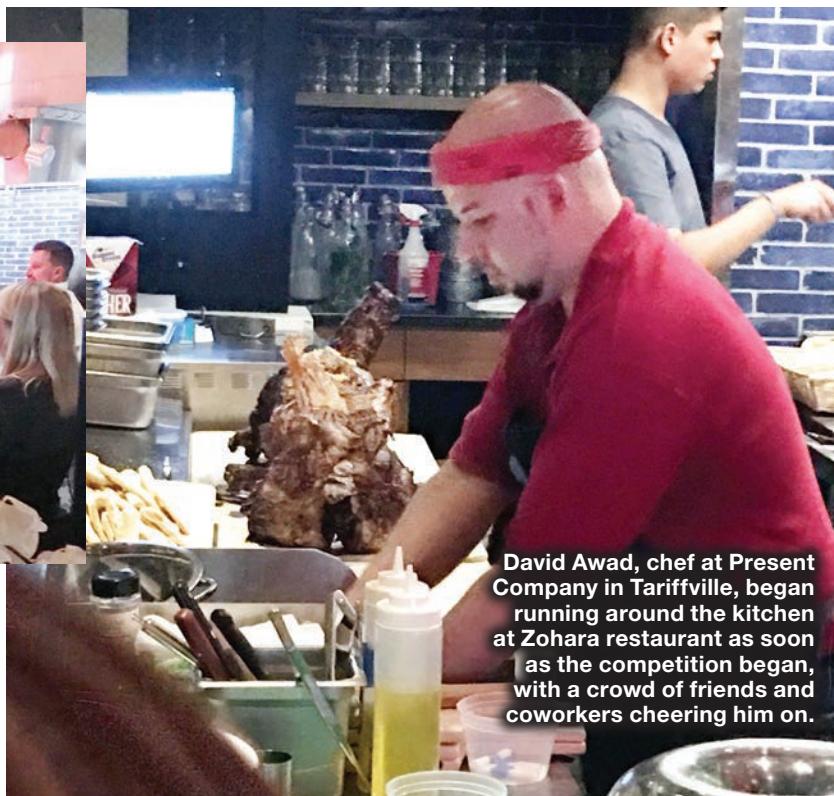
"We have a lot of specialty cocktails at the Rooster Company, so I'm ready for whatever comes," Rooster Company bar manager Steve Ferguson said. "I'm hoping it'll be fun."

Judging the competitions are a panel of three to four judges assembled by Fritz and Dardenne.

"We tried to choose judges who



Hundreds of people packed Zohara Mediterranean Kitchen in West Hartford Center for the sixth round of 86'D, a chef battle where competitors don't learn their mystery ingredients until the start of the competition.



"We wanted to do something local and do something food related, and it's just been incredible. We've sold out every single event."

-Jeannette Dardenne

have some kind of relationship with the food and restaurant industry," Dardenne said. "We always have the host restaurant's chef or owner as one."

In addition to taste, the panel was tasked with judging based on plating, originality and cleanliness of station.

For all of those involved, the 86'D event is as much about the community as it is about the food.

"It's incredible the response that we've gotten, from industry and non-industry people alike," Dardenne said.

"It's really about the community," Fritz added. "It's nice to have this industry that all works together and can have these friendly competitions."

In addition to helping the greater restaurant community, it was important to Fritz, Dardenne and Miller to help the community at large. Tickets for 86'D were \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door and all of the proceeds went to benefit End Hunger Connecticut, a social services organization based out of Hartford. So far, Eat IN

Connecticut and the 86'D events have donated more than \$4,000.

"We wanted to do something local and do something food related, and it's just been incredible," Dardenne said. "We've sold out every single event."

"The community has really embraced this, which is what the point of this was," Fritz added. "We've really had the most generous support for this."

Though the final 86'D chef battle was held on June 5, Fritz and Dardenne said that they have already

had requests for its return next year. Until then, Eat IN Connecticut will continue to host other events throughout the area, including the First Annual Wine & Food Festival held on June 17, which brought together food and wine from across Connecticut and nearly 1,000 visitors.

"It's very important for us to always give back to the community," Dardenne said. **WHL**

For more information on Eat IN Connecticut, visit www.eatin-ct.com.

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The gift of life

Local women make living organ donation to save strangers

by Abigail Albair
Executive Editor



Diane Mack and Robin Gilmartin are both altruistic living kidney donors. They gave their organs through minimally invasive surgery at Yale New Haven Hospital to save the lives of people they had never met.

Sixteen days after donating a kidney, Robin Gilmartin was feeling back to her usual self.

The psychotherapist and licensed clinical social worker, who has a private practice, returned to work for a reduced schedule in just the second week following her surgery and had completely returned to her normal routine soon after.

As far as she's concerned, she paid a minimal price to save a life.

"The surgery itself is done laparoscopically and it's a relatively easy surgery despite the fact that you're giving an organ," she said with a chuckle. "I was up and walking the same day of the surgery. I just had four little holes where they inserted the instruments, so just small incisions."

Gilmartin, 61, chose to make a

living kidney donation in May of this year after her wife, Diane Mack, did so 18 months ago.

The West Hartford residents were inspired when they read a newspaper article in 2015 about an altruistic donor.

"It told about a woman, who looked from the picture as if she was our age, who gave a kidney to somebody she didn't know," Mack recalled. "She had the surgery done at Yale New Haven and her donation started a chain of donations."

The chain, often called a domino transplant, occurs when a living person gives a kidney to a stranger. Often, the recipient's family member who was not a match for them offers to donate to another person incompatible with their own hopeful donor. This can result in a network of donors, each person giving to an unrelated recipient for whom they are a match, to form a chain.

So far this year, Yale New Haven Hospital has done 29 living donor transplants, according to Joyce Albert, a kidney living donor coordinator there.

"My job is to screen, evaluate and work up patients for living [donations] and present their [cases] at our donor panel," Albert explained.

Once a patient has been approved for a transplant, she schedules the surgery.

According to the United Network For Organ Sharing, before an organ is allocated, all transplant candidates on the waiting list that are incompatible with a donor because of blood type, height, weight or other medical factors are automatically screened from any potential matches and the UNOS' computer system then determines the order in which other candidates for transplant

receive an offer.

When a transplant hospital accepts a person as a transplant candidate, all their medical information is entered into the UNOS network and, when consent is given by a donor, the same is done for that person. Matches are unique to each donor and each organ and candidates who appear highest on the list for transplant are those most in need and with the best chance of survival, according to UNOS.

The kidney exchange program at Yale New Haven Hospital's Center for Living Organ Donors develops between incompatible pairs and offers opportunities for those who are a match with their recipient to help other patients through exchange.

"We had never thought about living organ donation before," Mack said. "Both Robin and I are

organ donors on our licenses but hadn't thought about the possibility of being a live organ donor."

Mack called the transplant center at Yale to talk about her options.

"I was skeptical if I'd be able to donate because I was 65 years old, but much to my surprise they invited me to come down and go through a testing process and told me age alone would not be a factor as long as I was healthy," she recalled.

Testing to ensure a person is in shape for donation is extensive. It includes meetings with a social worker, transplant surgeon, dietitian, donor advocate and psychiatric professionals, as well as an EKG, 24-hour blood pressure monitoring, blood tests, 24-hour urine testing and other evaluations.

"[Donors] get a full workup," explained Nancy Moody, the living donor community health coordinator for liver and kidney at Yale New Haven Hospital. "We need to make sure they are cleared medically, surgically and psychosocially. We have it streamlined so it's a one-day workup."

While Albert works with

patients for transplant, Moody works with the donors and monitors their health going forward.

Gilmartin said the couple learned through the process that a living kidney donation produces an organ that lasts roughly twice as long as an organ from a deceased donor.

"It's very likely that Diane's recipient will live 20 years with that

she knows he is still doing well.

For her part, Gilmartin felt a more personal connection when she learned she could be a living donor.

As a retired Veterans Administration clinical social worker, she remembers working early in her career with a Korean War veteran on dialysis.

ing for a patient's quality of life, Gilmartin noted.

"I can confidently say, I would rather donate a kidney than be on dialysis for one week," Gilmartin said. "[Donation] is relatively easy."

Her recipient was not yet on dialysis, but the need for it was imminent. Her donation launched a domino transplant that has continued until this past month when additional transplants resulted from the chain she began.

"[The first recipient] has a sister who is a match for her and could have gone through with the donation as a cut-and-dried kind of thing, but they both agreed that they would rather wait and see if it was possible to put together a chain," Gilmartin said. "I had been offered to make my donation at the end of 2016, or wait and see if they could put together a chain as it's challenging to match up recipients and donors. There is a huge need, so putting together these chains is a way of making the most of the donations and helping the most people."

The sister of Gilmartin's recipient donated to a person who was not a match for their loved

"It's just this kind of magical thing to feel that you've saved a life, or at least made a life much more bearable."

-Robin Gilmartin

same kidney, whereas if it were a cadaver kidney it might have only lasted 10," Gilmartin said.

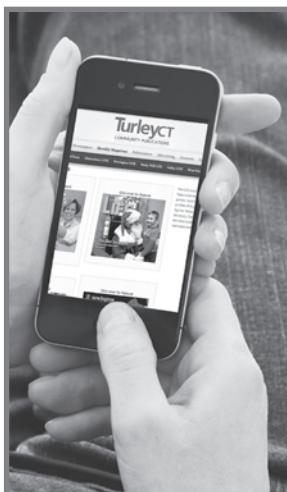
Mack has never met the recipient of her kidney and does not know his name, but she does know he'd been living on dialysis for seven years before his transplant.

Whenever she goes to Yale for routine follow up testing, she asks about him. Although she can't be told any details for privacy reasons,

"We would meet for sessions [during his treatment]," she said. "It gave me a strong appreciation for the hardships of dialysis, not just for the patient but on the family. Your life is very relegated in terms of what you can eat and drink."

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one, but that person in turn gave to someone else.

"It's just this kind of magical thing to feel that you've saved a life, or at least made a life much more bearable," she said, adding that she hopes to meet her recipient and possibly others in the donor chain soon.

"It's a great gift," Albert said. "Especially in a case like Robin's, when you come in and you're non-directed [meaning you are giving your kidney to anyone in need] and you start a chain, you can help many, many people."

In addition to their surprise at the ease of donating, Gilmartin and Mack were also surprised by the level of follow-up care.

"The Yale transplant team is the most amazing team," Mack said. "They essentially follow you through life, so we're kind of part of this community that Yale has built of donors throughout the state. They follow donors for the duration of your life."

A commitment is also made to living donors that should anything happen – a car accident for example – and a donor's remaining kidney is damaged, that person shoots to the top of the transplant list.

"To the extent there is a risk, they are committed to taking care of donors," Mack said.

Although the living donation program began 20 years ago, the Center for Living Organ Donors at Yale New Haven is a new program begun less than a year ago.

While the government regulates transplant centers to follow the health of organ donors for two years following the surgery, Yale New Haven is the only program to offer

"It's the gift of life and it's really, truly a gift. It's an inspirational act."

- Nancy Moody

lifelong monitoring of kidney or liver health, Moody said.

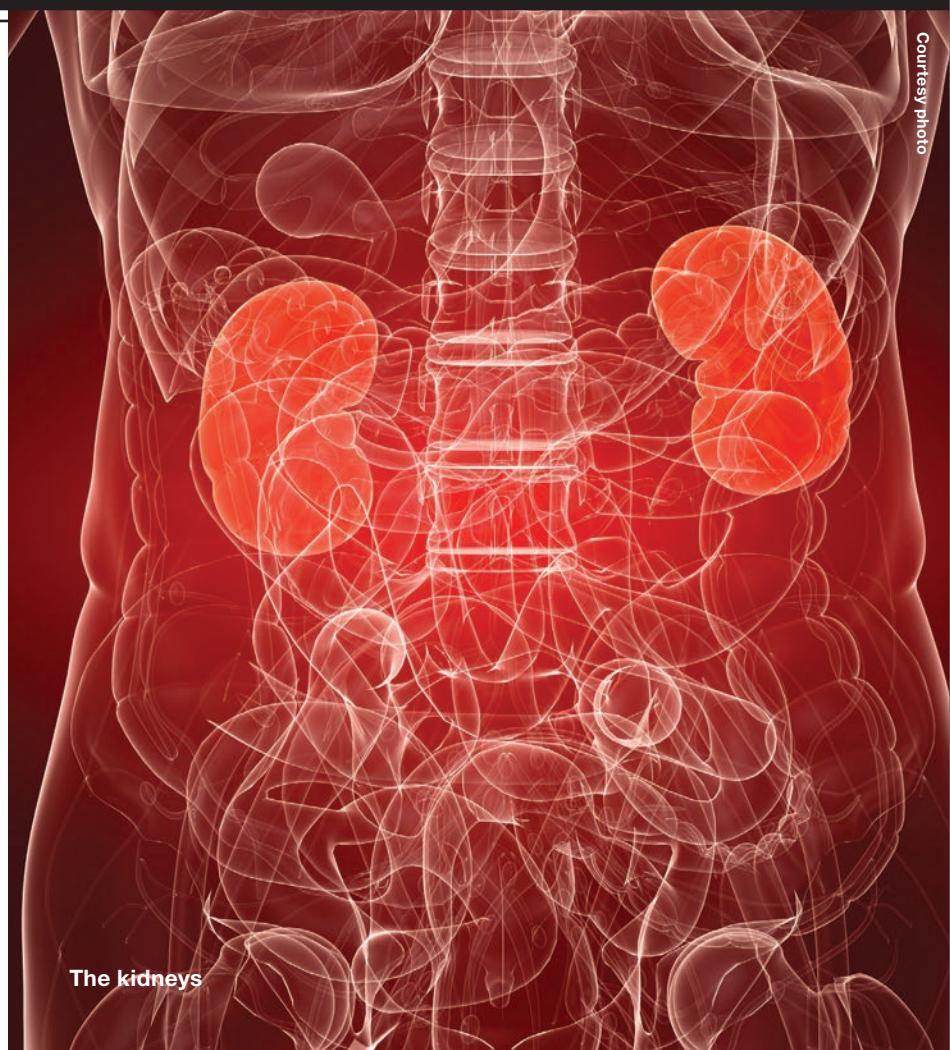
According to its website, the program is the first in the United States to offer long-term medical and social monitoring related to kidney and liver donation at no cost, and outreach efforts organized by Moody include events with prior donors that focus on preventative health and increasing awareness of living donation.

The events to allow living donors to network with one another and allow prospective living donors the chance to speak in person with those who've given an organ.

While her work is specifically with donors, Moody has been a nurse her entire career and worked in transplant coordination since 1998, and she appreciates the opportunity to see the life-changing impact of organ donation.

"I like continuity of care," she said. "[Patients] come in pre-transplant and you see them in end stage renal or liver disease, and when you see them get their organ, you see them get well, you see them get better. It's just a joy. It's extremely, extremely rewarding."

Yale New Haven has roughly 800



The kidneys

patients on its kidney transplant list, and Moody estimates another 300 patients are waiting for a kidney on Hartford Hospital's list.

"The waiting time here is up to five to seven years," she said. "Living donation is helping people come off of the deceased donor waitlist. People die waiting on the list."

Thirty million American adults have chronic kidney disease and millions more are at increased risk.

According to Donate Life America, 118,000 people are awaiting organ transplants, 82 percent of

which are in need of a kidney. Every day, 22 people die waiting for an organ.

"I get goosebumps," Moody said of working with living donors. "It's the gift of life and it's really, truly a gift. It's an inspirational act. People that do this are not thinking of themselves. They're thinking of someone else."

"Donors are just amazing people," Albert said. "One person who comes forward has the opportunity to make a lot of changes in different peoples' lives." **WHL**

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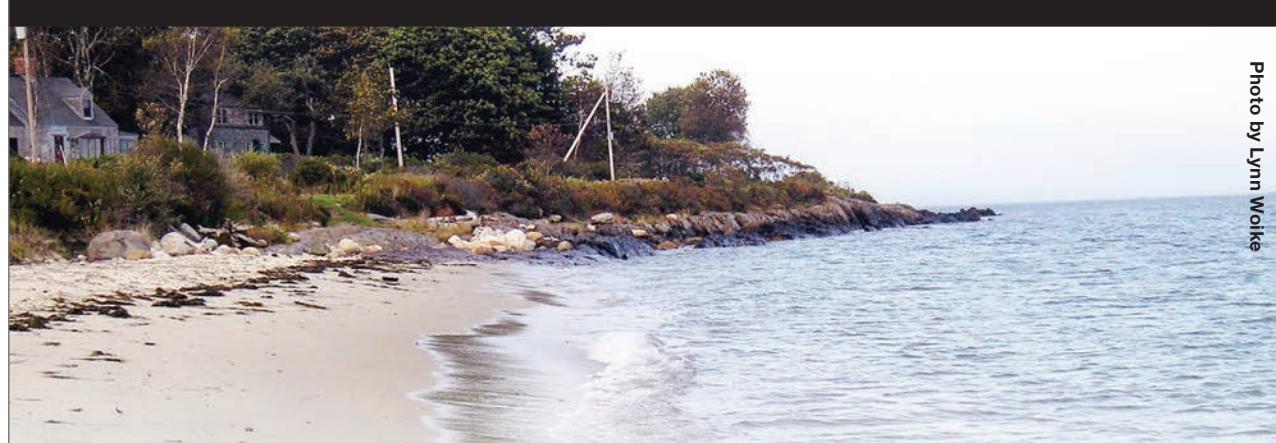


Photo by Lynn Woike

Writer's block

Vacation daze

by Lynn Woike
Editor

As I write this, my sister is in the Berkshires spending a quiet week with her husband so that she can recover from their 10-day vacation to Italy and Slovenia that ended eight days before this one began. Social media posts kept me abreast of stunning sites and many meals.

A friend is leaving Ireland, on her way to Iceland where she will celebrate her birthday before returning to West Hartford and another friend is at a resort in Orlando. Two more are preparing to go to Hawaii.

In early June, two retired friends began their second automotive adventure. This one has taken them to Utah, bringing with them a basket of small stuffed animals and their Facebook followers.

I'm sure they're on your Facebook pages, too – those people taking fabulous vacations to amazing places and where they do interesting things.

I used to like vacations like that, a long, long time ago.

But now I prefer vacations where I do absolutely nothing, except a lot of reading and watching the clouds change shape.

For a few years, I vacationed on a small island in Maine. I could go days without seeing anyone and longer still without talking to anyone. Time was spent walking the

beach, napping in the rope swing, reading on the porch and walking on the beach some more.

One of my best vacations was spent in a small one-room cottage at the end of a dirt road while it rained for four days – venturing out only once for a short rowboat tour of one end of the lake.

I believe vacations should be about rest and relaxation. Calm, low-impact times without zip lines or lines of any kind – no casinos, far from theme parks and malls, surrounded by nature that invites leisurely strolls and lazy meandering to find memorable meals. No crowds. No traffic. No noise. I want to expend energy only to get on the massage table or out of the jacuzzi. I rarely listen to music or sit in front of a screen, although I have done "Grace and Frankie" and "Bewitched" marathons.

Clocks and the schedules they define are pretty much not allowed.

I've been lucky enough to get spend this kind of vacation on beaches, a farm in the mountains and a home with a fireplace when a snowstorm prevented travel.

With nothing to do, it's easier to live in the moment. Time seems to slow down. It takes me a while to ease into the rhythm, but once I'm there, it's blissful. The guilt of not exploring is washed away along with the stress of my always-something-else-that-needs-doing life. Serendipity creeps into the space planning occupies the rest of the year. There's a sense of freedom and permission to do anything. There's

nowhere to be and nothing to do. Endless possibilities replace expectations, including the expectation to take a shower or get dressed, which is empowering.

I don't seek adventure or anything more invigorating than a dip in the pool.

For a short period, suspended in an otherworld, it feels as if you have all the time in the world, up until the last night. There is a correlation between how refreshing it was and how unproductive it was. It's rejuvenating. The mind and the body get much-needed rest after working through the two-page check list of all that had to be done before you could leave, including preparing the to-do list for as soon as you return.

Despite that added stress immediately before and after, vacations are good for your health. Research shows that people who don't take them are more likely to have heart attacks. While long weekends are nice and weeks are traditional, a study declared that 10 days is the perfect amount of time for a vacation. It allows enough time to get out of the everyday mode of needing to be effective and efficient and find a state of total relaxation – putting the vacate in vacation.

If all goes right, I will get one of those this fall.

Of course, the gold standard is to be earning your living doing something you love so much you never need a vacation from it. I'll do that as soon as I can get paid to give people permission to do what they've always wanted to do. **WHL**



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Healthy in a minute

Quick tips for living strong

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Sometimes it can seem hard to maintain a healthy lifestyle. You're busy. You're saturated with so much information, much of it conflicting. Who has the time to schedule in one more thing?

Well, you do! Believe it or not, there are quick and easy steps you can take to improve your health – and you can start right now in as little as one minute. Let's get started:

Stand up

If you're one of the many people who spend their entire workday sitting in front of a computer, here's an easy to-do. According to Jennifer Garza, ScD., ergonomist for UConn Health, taking even one minute per hour to stand up, stretch, move or walk may be beneficial for your health.

"Prolonged sitting is linked to increased risk for disease and death. And, recent studies estimate that physical inactivity contributes to more than 300,000 deaths annually in the United States," she said.

"There is some good news, though. Evidence suggests that alternating between sitting, standing and moving throughout the day may reduce back pain and promote better cholesterol levels and glucose regulation. It may even help you to become more productive."

It really is that simple. While some people opt to use a sit-stand workstation while working on computer-related tasks, Garza cautions

against completely replacing sitting with standing.

"Too much standing, which has been associated with pain, fatigue and chronic venous insufficiency, can be just as harmful as too much sitting," she noted.

Rather, try to incorporate movement throughout your day.

"You may consider walking to a printer or bathroom farther away than the ones you normally use; talking with a colleague in person instead of sending an email or text; taking the stairs instead of the elevator; holding walking meetings; or starting a group stretching or exercise class," she suggested.

And more is definitely better. (You knew that.)

"If possible, try to incorporate at least three to five minutes of movement into every hour," Garza said. "However, even one minute less sitting per hour can help you to feel healthier, more comfortable and more productive."

And don't think that movement during the day is your free pass for binge watching in the evening.

"It is definitely worthwhile to keep the same principles in mind when using the computer, watching TV, or doing other sedentary activities during leisure time," Garza noted.

While watching TV, use the built-in timer – commercials – as your cue to get up and move.

Exercise

You knew this would be on the list. What might surprise you is that it doesn't take hours in the gym to have a positive impact.

Dr. Randall J. Risinger of Hartford Orthopedic Surgeons PC, which has an Urgent Care Walk-in Center in Avon, suggests stretching every day.

"Hamstring flexibility/stretching is critical to prevent and relieve low back pain and knee pain. It is also one of the best stretches to prevent sports-related lower extremity

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injuries. Stretching your hamstrings a few minute a day is a great investment," Risinger said. "Stretching your pectoralis muscles helps posture and, more importantly, can help prevent future shoulder problems," such as rotator cuff repair.

Dr. Alexa Veeder, a chiropractic physician and co-owner of Back to Motion in Newington, noted that even short workouts can pay big dividends.

She has created a quick lower body workout that can be done anywhere. It takes just 10 minutes, or can be done multiple times for a more complete workout.

"These workouts are good for anyone for a few reasons. It targets areas of the body that are important [in] everyday life. It is important to keep full-body workouts incorporated to keep individuals more active and overall strength [goals are] met. Those who do not incorporate full-body functional workouts are at a higher risk to become injured at activities that they like to do as hob-

bies due to lack of mobility and flexibility," she explained. "Balance is key for injury prevention such as ankle, knee and even low back injuries. By using these exercises on a regular basis, this can improve muscles around the ankles and other important lower body areas to help aid in stability of legs that one may not have developed without proper training."

Veeder, who is a marathoner, certified personal trainer and marathon coach, said that runners will find special benefits when they add in cross-training to their routines.

"Cross-training with strength workouts is necessary to see results for speed. Once you begin to build up core, glutes and accessory muscle strength, you will have a stronger momentum of the primary running muscles which, in turn, will improve overall running time," Veeder noted. "Cross-training accessory muscles is a must to improve speed and will propel you forward."

For training for an event such as a marathon, she recommends run-

ning three or four times per week with two or three cross-training strength sessions.

"Listen to your body and know when a rest day is needed," she advised.

Options for full functional body workouts include kettle bells and resistance bands, or simply using your body weight, such as in Veeder's workout below.

Whether you're a runner trying to improve your next race time or just want to be a little faster chasing

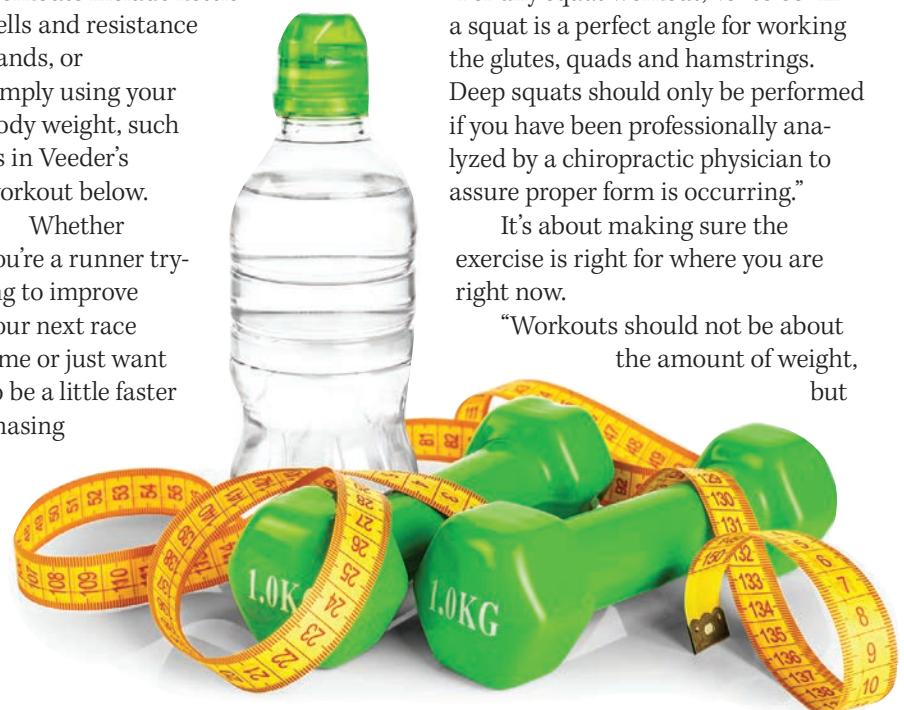
your kids around the yard, Veeder has a few suggestions for success.

"While performing a squat exercise, make sure to keep upper body squared, shoulders back, and the bending should be from the hips as the back remains erect," she said.

"For any squat workout, 45° to 55° in a squat is a perfect angle for working the glutes, quads and hamstrings. Deep squats should only be performed if you have been professionally analyzed by a chiropractic physician to assure proper form is occurring."

It's about making sure the exercise is right for where you are right now.

"Workouts should not be about the amount of weight, but



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about the duration and the importance of proper form in order to activate and fatigue your muscles safely and successfully after 60 seconds," Veeder added.

Here is Veeder's 10-minute Total Transformation Squat Workout:

Warm up with butt kick runs in place (four rounds of 60 seconds): 4 minutes

Squat with elbows bent at 90° angle (add weights to increase difficulty): 60 seconds

Plank position while maintaining hips parallel to the floor: 60 seconds

Push-ups (modify on the knees if needed): 60 seconds

Single leg isometric squat (45°-55°) alternating legs (add weights to increase the challenge): 30 seconds each side

Plank position with alternating knees into chest (keeping a flat back): 60 seconds

Walking lunges, forwards and backwards (add weights to increase difficulty): 60 seconds

Wall sits (hold a weight to increase difficulty).

Tip: Make sure your legs are at a 90-degree angle to properly work your quads: 60 seconds.

Have a little extra time? Repeat the entire circuit (sans warmup) three



more times; it will take you just over half an hour.

Read to your child

This is an easy action step with benefits for both parent and child.

"If you are the parent of an infant, toddler, preschool or early-school-aged child, you have likely questioned the best way to maximize your child's developmental potential. We live in a world that pushes parents to 'not miss out' on the important window of brain development that occurs in the early childhood years.

"We are bombarded with ads that promote the use of certain products – whether they are vitamins, nutritional supplements, educational games or technology-based learning tools – to ensure we give our children the best chance to succeed in life.

Many of these products are expensive, and the number of choices can be overwhelming and stress-inducing for parents. The good news is that with just 20 minutes a day and a trip to your bookshelf or local library you can improve your child's language skills, enhance their brain activity, develop a stronger parent-child relationship and reduce your own stress," Dr. Joy Hong, Prohealth Physicians, Somerset Pediatrics in Glastonbury, said.

Hong said that medical studies have shown that children who are read to at home have more activity in the brain areas that support understanding language and visual imagery. The research is promising for parents, too.

"Parents will also benefit as research done at the University of Sussex shows that reading reduces stress levels by more than two thirds within just six minutes," Hong said, noting an article published in The Telegraph, a British publication.

She said the process starts before you even pick up a book.

"Put away your cell phone. Turn it off, or put it in another room. Turn off the TV. Let your child see you do these things. Undivided parental attention is the most valuable gift you

can give your child," she noted.

Next, pick a story that you know your child likes.

"Children thrive on routine. Reading a familiar book is a great way to create a sense of comfort in an increasingly stressful world. Offer a new book or two, but always keep some of the old favorites available. Allow your child to choose the books and the order in which they will be read," Hong recommended.

"Let your child set the pace. Babies and young toddlers may be more interested in eating the book than reading it. That's OK. Preschool age children may jump up and run around in the middle of the book. This is normal. Tracking the words on the page with your finger, pointing at pictures and making funny sound effects are all ways to enhance the reading experience."

Hong recommends carrying the experience of reading beyond the page.

"Talk with your child about things that you have read. Make connections between books and things they see in the world around them," she said. "Nurturing a love of reading is a lifetime gift you can give your child – and it only takes 20 minutes a day." **WHL**

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Bite by bite

Eating mindfully is about more than what goes into your mouth

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Do you ever find yourself looking at an empty pint of ice cream or candy wrapper and wondering just where it all went? In our technologically connected, go-go-go world, it can be challenging to slow down enough to really experience what we're eating.

Mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn, founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, has an exercise where he has students eat a single raisin, a process that can take several minutes.

"I love Jon Kabat-Zinn's definition on mindfulness, 'Bringing awareness to the present moment without judgment.' I find it can be most helpful to utilize our five senses to do this. In today's society teeming with technology, mindfulness is more important than ever. When we are mindful, we have a much better chance of determining what we need. This is so important with mindful eating. So many folks start tearing open their large family-size bags of chips or cookies and begin the mindless pursuit of shoveling one chip or cookie into their mouths

with little recognition of this behavior. Only when the bag is empty, do they realize what they have done," Theresa Nygren, LCSW of The Mindful Self-Compassionate Way in Farmington, said.

"Mindful eating is a wonderful practice to notice the hunger and then determine what the body really craves. During mindful eating, attention is paid to the taste, texture and colors of food. Eating mindfully naturally allows the body to sense when it has had enough, which can help reduce the amount consumed. In our previous groups, participants are always surprised that when eating mindfully, they even tend to leave something on their plate. They have a much easier time determining when they have reached a comfortable place of fullness and can push away from the table before becoming

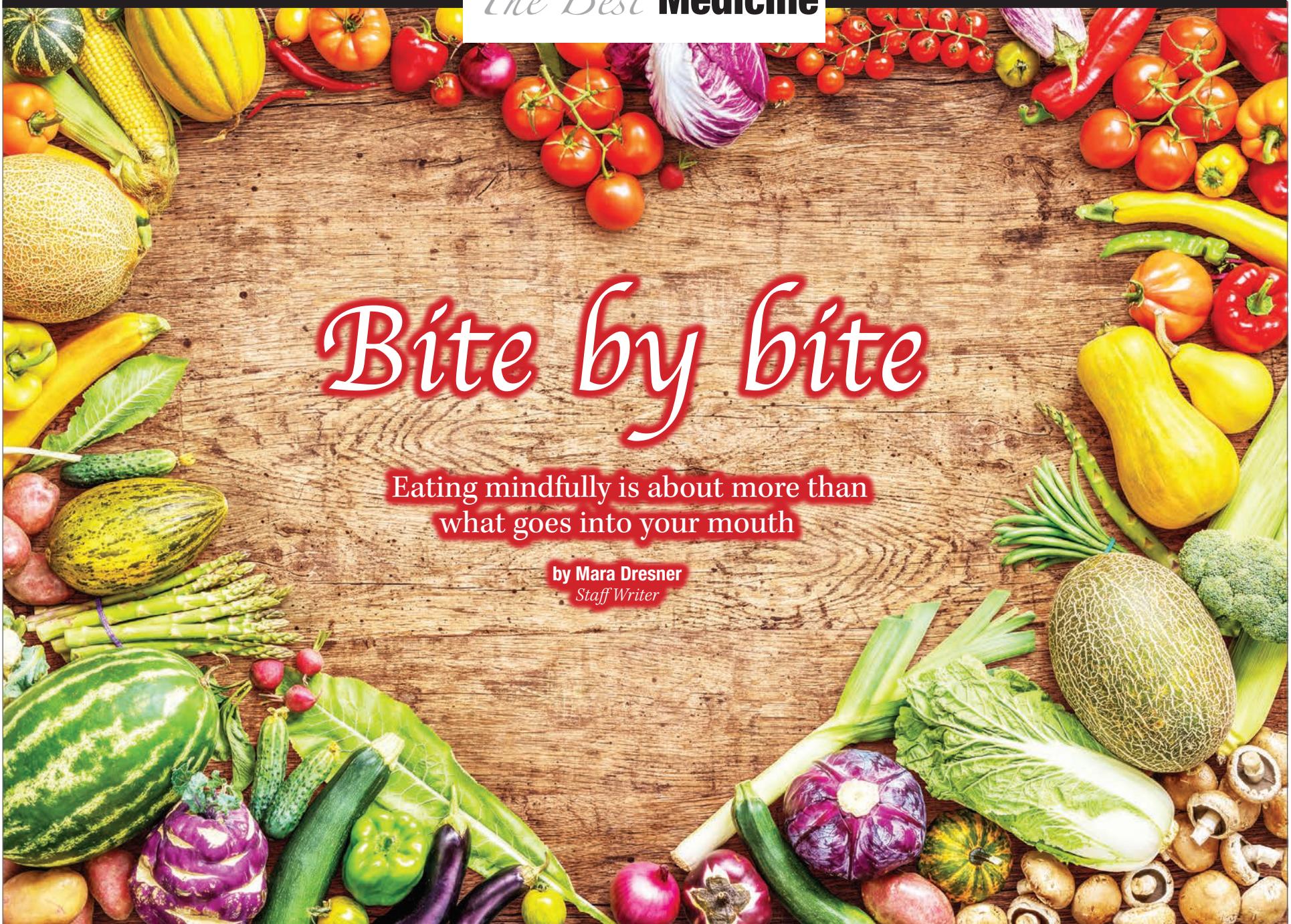
overly stuffed."

It's also about being conscious of what it took to get the food to your plate.

"Before eating begins, bring recognition to all of the hands that were involved in getting this food to your plate. These include the growers, truckers, supermarket folks, etc.," Nygren noted.

Mindful eating doesn't have to be a formal program. It can simply be a more conscious way to look at food.

"Mindfulness is being present in the moment and fully aware of what you are doing and why. Mindful eating is the basis of a healthy relationship with food. It is paying attention to not only what you are eating, but how much, how fast and why. It is fully enjoying the tastes and smells of the food, and eating to nourish the



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“Eating more mindfully can bring more joy to this daily activity, and by listening to your body will help you naturally maintain a proper weight and improved health.”

- Jackie Stevenson

body. When beginning to eat more mindfully, one must slow down and make eating an activity separate from all others. Mindful eating is eating when you are truly hungry, not stressed, upset or bored, and stopping when you are satisfied, not stuffed or sick,” Jacqui Campbell, MS, RD, CDN, of Bordeaux Nutrition LLC in Newington, explained.

“Mindless eating is what happens when we are rushed and eating on the go, or when we sit down in front of the TV after a stressful day. This often leads to making poor food choices, overeating and the myriad of health effects that come with those choices,” Jackie Stevenson, DTR, also of Bordeaux Nutrition, added. “Mindful eating is focusing on the food and enjoying it, chewing slowly, pausing in between bites, and listening to your body to fullness cues and how specific foods make you feel. Eating more mindfully can bring more joy to this daily activity, and, by listening to your body, will help you naturally maintain a proper weight and improved health.”

Truly eating mindfully can be a challenge, so you may want to start incrementally.

“Start with something small like a snack or cup of coffee. Try not to be reading the paper when you’re doing that to see how different it feels. What we’re trying to do is slow people down,” Sharon Gutterman, Ph.D., of Mindful Wow! in West Hartford said. “Other things that help people slow down are to put your fork down between bites or to try eating a meal with chopsticks. Slowing down helps us with savoring and, when we begin this, we can pay attention to when we really are full. Otherwise, it’s as if we haven’t eaten.”

Eating with your non-dominant hand is another technique to try.

“When we eat really in the present moment – you can’t eat in the past, you can’t eat in the future – all the senses can be engaged right now in this present moment. You can’t do this every single time with every single thing we eat,” Gutterman said. “It’s helpful to be aware, smelling our food, tasting our food, hearing the crunch of the food, savoring the flavors. Having gratitude for this food and how it came to us, for the sunshine and the rain, the growers and the truckers, the package designers, the food, to me then becomes elevated from an ordinary experience to something quite extraordinary.”

Nygren noted that the process of eating mindfully begins before you even sit down for a meal.

“In order to experiment with eating more mindfully, it is probably best to select one meal a day to practice this new behavior, perhaps selecting a meal where there is a bit more time to slow things down. Before meal time begins, it can help to notice on a scale of one to 10 of how hungry you are. Is it the

clock that signals it is time to eat? Or is it your stomach that is growling with the beginning signal of needing some fuel for your body? If you are eating according to clock time and can put off eating until true hunger shows up, give more time for your body to guide you.

“Our bodies hold the wisdom, but we as a society are often so disconnected from the messages while at the same time having an inner dialogue attacking our bodies in some ways. The litany goes like this, ‘How did I ever get so fat? I hate my belly. My thighs are enormous. My stomach is disgusting.’ You get the picture. Befriending our bodies is so important in this process of becoming more mindful,” she said.

“So, once you are tending to true hunger, arrange a plate with a colorful array of whole foods. Then notice how your food looks. As you take your first bite, really enjoy the burst of flavors as you slowly chew this mouthful of food. Is it salty, sweet, sour?

“Placing the fork down between bites can help facilitate this mindful practice. Perhaps while your fork rests on the table, it would be a good time for a deep belly breath,” she continued. “As you consume your meal, keep checking in with your belly regularly to see if it is signaling it has had enough. Can you pause when you get this signal? So many Americans just keep on eating until their plates are clean as a whistle. Let your stomach be your guide. Eating in this fashion can aid digestion, release weight and increase a positive frame of mind.”

And mindfulness – and its benefits – reach far beyond the dining room table.

“Living mindfully to me is about being as aware as I can to what’s going on within and around me. As an example, this morning when I was walking, I spontaneously began to say to myself, ‘Right now, I feel the sun on my head. I feel this cold breeze. I can tell my legs know how to walk and I am grateful for that. My haircut feels so good. Am I satisfied? And that’s huge for me to ask. Right now I am smiling.’ It’s coming back to what my senses and thoughts and feelings are telling me right now,” Gutterman explained.

She noted that many people live in the future, worrying about the “what if.” Others ruminate about the past, focusing on the “if only.”

She said that living mindfully helps us be cognizant of those patterns.

“When I’m aware I’m somewhere not wholesome or healthy or doing me much good,” she said, “I just remind myself what I have is breathing moment to moment.” **WHL**

Learn more at bordeauxnutrition.com, mindfulselfcompassionateway.com, and mindfulwow.com.

Feeling overwhelmed?

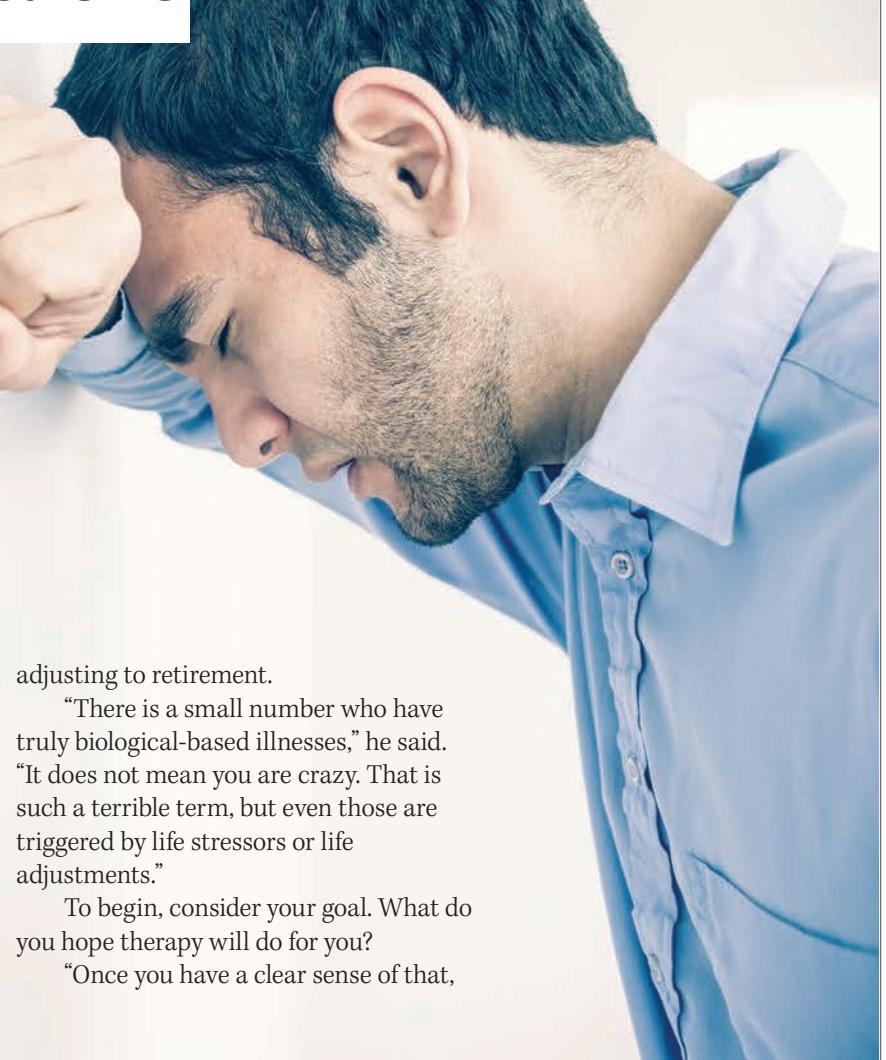
How to find a good fit for help

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

Change can be exciting and exhilarating, or draining and overwhelming. It is often a change in circumstances that leads an individual to seek ways to adjust and move forward. Sometimes the help of a therapist is needed.

But how? That, too, can be overwhelming, but it does not have to be.

"The most common diagnosis I use in my practice is what is called adjustment disorder diagnosis," Mitch Page, LCSW of Newington, said, adding that while anxiety and depression may be involved what his patients are often struggling with is a life change. This could be a loss of a job, having a baby, losing a spouse, or even



adjusting to retirement.

"There is a small number who have truly biological-based illnesses," he said. "It does not mean you are crazy. That is such a terrible term, but even those are triggered by life stressors or life adjustments."

To begin, consider your goal. What do you hope therapy will do for you?

"Once you have a clear sense of that,

Did you know?



According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, certain factors make women more likely than men to develop osteoporosis, a bone disease that occurs when the body loses too much bone, produces too little bone or both.

One such factor is that women tend to have smaller, thinner bones than men. Another reason women are more vulnerable to osteoporosis than men concerns the hormone estrogen. Estrogen is a hormone in

women that serves many functions, one of which includes protecting bones. Production of estrogen decreases sharply when women reach menopause, the period in a woman's life when she ceases menstruating.

The National Institute on Aging notes that the average woman has her final period at age 51. Once women reach menopause, the accompanying decline in estrogen production can cause bone loss.

This is one reason why women's risk for osteoporosis increases after menopause and why recommended intake of calcium and vitamin D, both of which can help women prevent osteoporosis, is different for women age 50 and below than it is for women age 51 and older.



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that can guide you to the help you can get," Page said.

When in the midst of an overwhelming life event, it can be difficult to think clearly. However, it could be beneficial to take a deep breath and find help.

"Facing a major life transition or other life issue that the person might benefit from having an objective professional third party's help with," Elliott Strick, LMFT of West Hartford said, is the best way to know when therapy might be a good option.

"These might include loss of a job, ending of a relationship/marriage, death of someone close, assistance with recovery from addiction, all of which might lead to feelings of depression or anxiety that don't get resolved easily or in a reasonable amount of time," Strick said. In other words, it could be, he said, "an emotional problem that is adversely affecting the quality of one's life."

Strick has counseled individuals and couples who are wrestling with infidelity issues, communication within a relationship, the ending of a relationship, those overcoming pain resulting from trauma in the past, or anxiety and depression.

Finding a good fit with a therapist could lead to positive outcomes. However, there are some questions a patient might want to think about before choosing.

Page suggested thinking about whether you would feel most comfortable with a male or female practitioner, or one who specializes in a particular area such as transgender or LGBTQ issues.

"Another consideration, obviously, is finances," Page said. Those who have

insurance through their employer may cover the deductibles for a therapist and, in other instances, the provider has a contract with a insurance agency to charge a specific amount. "I am ethically obligated to charge the contracted fee," Page said.

In addition to questions about finances, gender and location, Strick suggests that patients also discuss the therapist's experience with relevant issues. Once these questions have been thought over, the next step would be to consider how to best approach therapy. Would seeing someone one on one in an office environment be preferable? Or, it might be best to seek a group practice with an MD on staff in the event the medications need to be prescribed. There are also clinical options available and practices specializing in a specific area, such as women's or geriatric issues.

Resources to find a therapist include an individual's own doctor. Page explained that men tend to ask their primary care physician for a referral, while women often ask their OBGYN. Either way, a trusted professional can often make an appropriate suggestion.

In addition, Page said the 2-1-1 Infoline can be helpful.

"They are trained clinicians, not licensed health professionals. They can help you sort through what type of help you need," Page said, adding that they can use a zip code or the name of a town in order to find a nearby therapist.

If possible, Strick suggested interviewing, in person, more than one therapist before making a choice. Additionally, one can ask friends and family members or a primary care

doctor. Online profiles on psychotherapy sites can offer some leads. Websites such as goodtherapy.org, psychologytoday.com or therapistlocator.net are good places to start, according to Strick.

Once an appointment is made, Page said patients can expect to discuss in the first session or two what he referred to as a "contract," often in the form of a series of questions: How can I help you? What are you working on? How will you know if I have been helpful? What will be different after three sessions, after eight sessions? In some instances the therapist and patient may have a more formal contract that is signed, otherwise it is a verbal contract so both have a clear understanding of what the goals are for the patient. The goal could be anything from feeling more hopeful, having more energy, or not arguing with your spouse as much.

"You will know after two or three [sessions] if one, you are making progress toward your goal and, two, separate from the goals, you want to make sure the fit is right," Page said.

Ed Federici, LMFT, based in Wethersfield refers to this as fantasy.

"What is the fantasy of what the therapy is going to do for me?" he said.

"I am looking to receive something" from patients Federici said. "That is one of the first questions I ask clients."

From there Federici is interested in finding out what brought the patient in – what they are hoping to get out of therapy.

Additionally, Federici encourages patients to ask themselves questions. Among them are, "What is my hope if therapy goes well? What am I feeling

like inside? What are the externals that are different in my life because of therapy?" he said.

Federici recommends patients come in for at least four sessions in order to determine whether or not things are moving in the direction they had hoped.

"Clients come in with their defenses up. That's good, but sometimes we shield the therapy throughout that defense mechanism," Federici said.

"If you still have that same feeling at the third session, then maybe its time, we might not mesh well. I take no offense. This is not working out. I have lots of good colleagues I can refer you to," Federici said.

"I think in the beginning people come in and they are very vulnerable," he said, adding that a patient may also come in feeling very confident.

"Whatever they present, I want to make sure that I am creating a safe place so they can seek the truth," Federici said. "I want to create safety and then after that I want to be able to help them find and access their strength and create that life they wanted or discover the life they want to create; help them find their strength."

Ultimately, seeking help should not make one feel ashamed or embarrassed. "We all go through challenges in life; we feel alone," Page said. "No one should feel shame or embarrassment to meet with someone if they need help or are in trouble."

"We think mental health care is underutilized by the thousands across this country. It's evident in the suicide rate across the country," Page said.

"Get help. It's out there. Everyone needs help once in awhile." **WHL**

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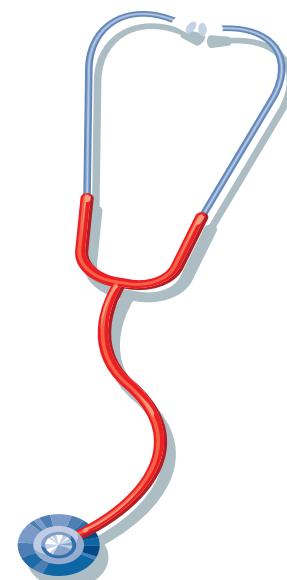


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Healthy habits to combat stress

Stress has an immediate and potentially long-term effect on the human body. Though it's a natural response to both good and bad experiences, stress, when chronic, can produce a host of negative consequences that greatly diminish one's quality of life.

Combating stress can sometimes be difficult, as the causes of stress are never too far away for many adults. In its 2015 "Stress in America™: Paying With Our Health" survey, the American Psychological Association found that money is the top cause of stress for Americans. The survey was conducted on behalf of the APA by Harris Poll, which asked more than 3,000 participants about their issues with stress.

Sixty-four percent said money was a somewhat or very significant source of stress, and that number was even higher for parents (77 percent). Survey respondents also noted that work is a significant source of stress.

Few adults can imagine a life that does not include financial- or work-related stress. But there are ways to combat stress that can benefit people's long-term health and improve their present-day quality of life.

Develop a support network.

Speaking about problems with trusted friends and family members can be an effective way to combat stress. The APA study found that participants who reported having an emotional support network reported lower stress levels than those who had no such networks on which to rely. Try to overcome any reticence you might have about speaking about your stress to a close friend or trusted relative on those days when

stress seems overwhelming.

Get more exercise. Routine exercise is another healthy way to combat stress. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America, studies have shown that exercise can reduce fatigue, improve alertness and concentration, and enhance overall cognitive function. Those are considerable benefits to people dealing with elevated levels of stress, which can contribute to both physical and mental fatigue and negatively impact one's ability to concentrate. Studies also have shown that regular exercise can decrease tension, which tends to increase as stress levels rise, and elevate and help to stabilize mood, which often decreases as stress levels increase.

Don't lean on alcohol after stressful days. Many people respond to stressful days by consuming alcohol. While alcohol helps some people forget

a stressful day, it also produces psychological and physiological side effects that can compound the effects of the very stress drinkers are looking to relieve. People who drink to alleviate stress may only be doing more harm with each drink, so find a way to cope with stress that has a more positive impact on both your body and mind than that produced by alcohol.

Breathe deeply. The American Institute of Stress notes that focused breathing is a relaxation response that stimulates the nervous system and promotes a sense of calmness. Deep breathing can combat stress, lower blood pressure and draw your attention away from those things that are causing your stress. Visit www.stress.org to learn about deep breathing exercises.

Stress is a fact of life for many people. But while stress may be inevitable, it can be overcome. **WHL**



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Music may have the ability to soothe, heal and inspire physical activity.

How music may improve health

Plato said, "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything." Music often communicates messages that are not easily expressed, which is one reason why music is such an integral part of so many people's lives.

While many people love music for its entertainment value, there is growing evidence that music can be good for overall health as well. A study from researchers at the Cleveland Clinic focused on the use of music for brain surgery patients who must be awake during their pro-

cedures. Researchers found that music enabled the patients to manage anxiety, reduce pain and relax more fully during their procedures.

In a study titled, "The effect of music intervention in stress response to cardiac surgery in a randomized clinical trial," a team of Swedish researchers measured serum cortisol, heart rate, respiratory rate, mean arterial pressure, arterial oxygen tension, arterial oxygen saturation, and subjective pain and anxiety levels for patients who had undergone cardiothoracic surgery.

Those who were allowed to listen to music during recuperation and bed rest had lower cortisol levels than those who rested without music.

Many doctors now play music while operating or enable patients to listen to music to calm their nerves during in-office procedures.

According to Caring Voice Coalition, an organization dedicated to improving the lives of patients with chronic illnesses, music has also been shown to enhance memory and stimulate both sides of the brain, which may help individuals recover from stroke or those suffering from cognitive impairments.

Music also can have a positive impact on mood.

Neuroscientists have discovered that listening to music heightens positive emotions through the reward centers of the brain.

Music stimulates the production of dopamine, creating positive feelings as a result.

Some researchers think that music may help improve immune response, promoting faster recovery from illness. Undergraduate students at Wilkes University measured the levels of IgA — an important anti-

body for the immune system's first line of defense against disease — from saliva. Levels were measured before and after 30 minutes of exposure to various sounds, including music. Soothing music produced significantly greater increases in IgA than any of the other conditions.

Another way music has been linked to improved health is its ability to make physical activity seem less mundane.

Listening to songs can distract one from the task at hand, pushing focus onto the music rather than the hard work being done. When exercising, upbeat music can help a person go a little further as they work to achieve their fitness goals than working out without music.

The benefits of music extend beyond enjoying a favorite song, as music can do much to contribute to one's overall health. **WHL**



The evolving world of Alzheimer's

Alzheimer's disease is one of the most prevalent types of dementia in the world, affecting an estimated 35.6 million people all over the globe, and that number is expected to double in 20 years.

The Alzheimer's Foundation of America estimates that as many as 5.1 million Americans may be living with Alzheimer's disease. Australian company Actinogen Medical says Alzheimer's is Australia's second biggest killer. According to a 2012 study commissioned by the Alzheimer's Society of Canada, 747,000 Canadians were living with cognitive impairment, which included, but was not limited to, dementia.

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disease and other types of dementia may experience a decline in mental function severe enough to reduce their ability to perform everyday activities. Some of the cognitive functions that may be impaired include memory, communication and language, ability to pay attention, reasoning and judgment, emotional control and social behavior.

There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, nor is there an effective long-term way to prevent potential mental decline. However, that has not stopped scores of researchers and medical teams that continue to study the efficacy of different drugs and therapies. The following are some of the more promising options in the works.

Leukine

A safety trial on the drug Leukine already is underway at the Colorado University Anschutz Medical Campus.

"We found, so far, that Leukine is safe in people with Alzheimer's

There is no cure for Alzheimer's disease, nor is there an effective long-term way to prevent potential mental decline. However, that has not stopped scores of researchers and medical teams that continue to study the efficacy of different drugs and therapies.

disease," said Dr. Huntington Potter, the director of Alzheimer's research at the university. "That means it doesn't have the side effects that so many other Alzheimer's drugs have had, which are swelling in the brain

and bleeding into the brain."

Leukine has been successful in removing the plaque or amyloid along the outside of nerve cells in the brain of mice. Researchers do not know the exact mechanism for removal, but the drug is working and working quickly. Leukine also may be helping the brain repair itself. The Alzheimer's Association has donated \$1 million toward financing the costs of the next phase of this trial.

Insulin

Neurologists at Rush University Medical Center are testing a type of insulin that is inhaled through a nasal spray to see if it improves cognition and memory function in people with mild cognitive impairment.

"There is growing evidence that insulin carries out multiple functions in the brain and that poor regulation of insulin may contribute to the development of Alzheimer's disease," said Dr. Neelum Aggarwal, a neurologist at Rush and the lead investigator of the study.

The 18-month clinical trial will study the nasal spray versus a placebo in 275 adults between the ages of 55 and 85.

Xanamem

Australian researchers at Actinogen Medical have begun trials of a new drug called Xanamem. More than 170 patients with mild dementia in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom will take part in the placebo-controlled 12-week trial. The medicine blocks the stress hormone cortisol in order to improve mental function for those with dementias. In 2015, an Edinburgh University study of mice showed reducing cortisol in the brain improved their memory and decreased the number of Alzheimer's-associated amyloid plaques in the brain.

Researchers continue to work as they seek a successful, long-term option for treating or preventing Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. **WHL**



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Heart health advice for women

Heart disease may be something most commonly associated with men, but it can be deadly for women as well. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heart disease is to blame for one in every four female deaths in the United States.

Recognizing the threat that heart disease poses is a great first step for women who want to avoid becoming one of the hundreds of thousands of

women who lose their lives to heart disease each year. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration offers the following advice to women looking to prioritize their heart health.

Thanks to food labels, it's easier than ever for women to consume heart-healthy diets. When examining labels, look for foods that are low in sodium and sugar. When planning meals, avoid foods that are high in trans fats. In 2015, the FDA ruled that trans fats were not recognized as safe for use in human foods and gave manufacturers three years to remove them from their products. The Cleveland Clinic advises consumers to check

labels for partially hydrogenated oils, a hidden source of trans fats.

Certain conditions can increase a woman's risk for heart disease. While women may not be able to turn back the clocks and prevent these conditions from developing, they can take them for the serious threat they are and do their best to manage them. High blood pressure, diabetes and high cholesterol can increase a woman's risk for heart disease. Take medications as directed, monitor blood sugar levels if you have diabetes, and routinely have your blood pressure and cholesterol tested to ensure any pre-existing conditions are not

increasing your risk for heart disease.

The FDA notes that many physicians prescribe aspirin to lower patients' risk of heart disease, clot-related strokes and other problems related to cardiovascular disease. However, there are risks associated with long-term aspirin use that should be discussed with a physician. According to the FDA, bleeding in the stomach, bleeding in the brain, kidney failure and certain types of stroke are some of the potential side effects of long-term aspirin use. Such side effects may never appear, but the risk that they might makes discussing the pros and cons of aspirin well worth it. **WHL**



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When a person feels ill, his or her doctor may assess any symptoms and then prescribe a particular medication to treat or alleviate those symptoms.

Personalized meds may be the future

Doctors prescribe medications hoping to treat sickness, but sometimes prescriptions fall short, leaving some to wonder if prescription medications could be customized more for individual needs? The science is already here.

Making specialized drugs is not a new concept. Prior to the rise of drug manufacturing companies, early pharmacists routinely customized ingredients. According to Professional Compounding Centers of America, customized medications are created through a process known as pharmacy compounding, which is defined as the art and science of preparing personalized medications for patients.

Specialized pharmacists take a practitioner's prescription and mix individual ingredients together in the exact dosage and strength required. Compounding may be done

to change the form of the medication from a pill to a liquid or to remove a certain additive or ingredient, such as gluten, that might cause an allergic reaction. The American Pharmacists Association says that compounding also can be used to flavor a medication in an effort to make it more palatable.

Compounded drugs can be just as safe as mass-produced prescriptions. And thanks to their tailor-made formulas, compounded medications also may help people avoid side effects and other adverse reactions. Compounding gives physicians flexibility in regard to how to best help their patients.

Compounding is done in hospital pharmacies and other health care facilities. There also are thousands of community-based pharmacies in the United States that specialize in compounding services. Pharmacists in

these facilities spend all of their time making special preparations.

All pharmacists and pharmacies engaged in compounding are subject to oversight by both federal and state authorities. On November 27, 2013, Congress amended the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act by enacting the Drug Quality and Security Act to ensure that compounded drugs are produced in accordance with applicable federal requirements. The National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities helps to oversee compounding in Canada. Preparations of products are subject to the Food and Drug Act and Regulations, Good Manufacturing Practice guidelines and inspection by Health Canada.

Pharmaceutical compounding may not be new, but it is increasingly relied on to create the best formulations for individual patients. **WHL**

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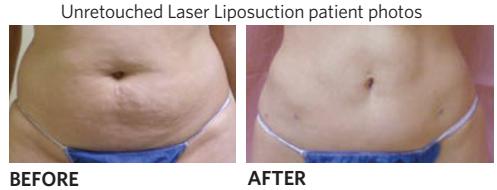
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When to let go

How to give the best love and care to elderly pets

by Nancy Thompson
LIFE Staff

We take them into our homes and our hearts, care for them and love them. And when our pets become old, we worry about them and want to give them the special care they need and deserve.

What should we look for, and how do we help? And, eventually, how can we know when it's time to let them go?

"With older pets, it's the same as with older people," said Stewart "Chip" Beckett, a veterinarian and the owner of Beckett and Associates Veterinary Services in Glastonbury. "They may not have the ability they used to have, but that doesn't mean they aren't

valuable members of the family."

He said there's no doubt about the value of the bond between humans and their pets, citing animals who help people with post-traumatic stress disorder, autism and other special needs. "It's a two-way street," he said. "The relationship may evolve, but it's still a good relationship."

The important issue is how the relationship might be changing. "Animals tell us when they're not enjoying life any more, just like people do," he said. "Are they interested in getting up and seeing us? Are they happy? If they're basically happy, that's great. A lot can be done with management to make old age better."

For example, he said putting rosin on the feet of dogs with spinal arthritis makes their paws sticky and helps with



mobility issues. Monitoring an older pet's dental health also is important.

"Dentistry is important," he said. "Abscessed teeth can release bacteria into the bloodstream, and dental disease is the root of a lot of kidney problems. It's an area where people can help."

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roam outside, and better control of fleas and other parasites have extended the average life span of many pets.

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Corey Shagensky, DVM

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practice, 10 years was a normal life span. Now they're living to 13 or 14 years."

Even with healthier food and better medication, at some point older pets will start to decline. Sometimes that's caused by mobility issues, kidney or heart disease, or other quality of life issues.

"Sometimes there are situations," he said. "A 15- or 20-pound dog is easier to pick up and carry than a 50-pound dog. Sometimes pet owners get to a point when they can't physically or emotionally do it. Some people just can't deal with it."

Others try everything they can to extend their pet's life.

"People's view of death and dying differ," Beckett said. "If you want to spend \$30,000 on chemo, surgery and radiation, I can do that, but not if you want to spend \$300. People have to ask what their budget is and have a clear idea of what to do."

He said people dealing with a pet with a chronic disease often get in further than they had anticipated.

"Often they try one more thing, then two weeks into it they're doing things they never thought they'd want to do. The vet's job is to tell you what's available, but I can't make the decision for you."

It's a tough decision to end a pet's life, and not one to be taken lightly. "When it's time, make sure everyone's on the same page," he said. "Remember that after we put them down, we can't make them come back."

Kristin K. Haviar, known as "Dr. K." to her clients at the Animal Hospital of Rocky Hill, said it's important for pet owners to look for changes in their aging pets' thirst, eating habits and behavior. She said increased thirst could be a sign of diabetes or kidney disease and recommended calling a vet and having blood work done. Appetite changes could be a sign of hormone imbalance and also could call for blood work.

A decrease in thirst or appetite also can be significant.

"With older pets we see changes at different times of year for no apparent reason," she

Pets and Vets

said. "We see cats, especially older cats, who are constipated. Sometimes they're just not feeling well. Some have diarrhea, others get dehydrated."

She said a decrease in appetite can be a symptom of a variety of issues, including kidney or liver disease and cancer. Haviar said dogs and cats often react differently to not feeling well.

"Cats are quiet," she said. "They sometimes act OK until the problem is severe. Dogs usually let you know."

Haviar said cats tend to get an overactive thyroid that makes them eat a lot of food while losing weight, while dogs, especially bigger dogs, often have an underactive thyroid and put on weight.

Dogs and cats should be checked out by their vet more often as they get older. "The most important thing is to have them seen more often, usually every six months, with blood work at least once a year," she said. Pet owners also should notice issues such as lameness, which might or might not be a symptom of a serious problem.

"Lameness for a day or two might be a soft tissue problem or achy joints, but if it lasts more than a couple of days or is severe it needs to be checked out."

Like people, older pets may experience cognitive issues.

"We're seeing pets live a lot longer," Haviar said. "Some experience cognitive dysfunction. They're awake at night, they become more vocal, and you see them staring into space, but there are supplements to help with that."

For Jacoba Nassar, a veterinarian at the Roaring Brook Veterinary Hospital in Canton, a pet's quality of life depends on a variety of issues, including comfort, its appetite, whether a pet is enjoying its normal routine and whether a pet is having more bad days than good days.

While not something to be taken lightly, she said she believes that euthanasia should be seen as a way for someone to take responsibility for their pet's dignified passing.

"That's the way it should be perceived," she said. "It's a nice option, sort of the next step for

treatment, the final treatment. Some say they waited too long. It's so personal," she said of the decision to end a pet's life. "It can't be well defined. It's not just one issue."

Barb Guse, a member of the staff at Veterinary Specialists of CT in West Hartford, is one of a small number of licensed physical therapists in the state who is certified as a canine rehabilitation practitioner and has a different perspective on the aging process in dogs.

"Old age is not a disease," she said. "You can't just say, 'Oh, he's just getting old.' It's important to check with a vet to see if the problem is something that needs to be treated."

She said that, while older dogs may lose strength and flexibility and be unable to do some of the activities they used to do, they can adapt to new routines.

"The owner shouldn't expect them to do the longer walks," she said. "Dogs require daily low-impact exercise, shorter walks, done more often. The owner needs to accept that the dog is aging. Even if they want to do long walks, they shouldn't because they could get hurt. You don't want to ask an older dog to jump into and out of a car or go up and down stairs. It's a safety issue, and it erodes their confidence, big time."

She said owners of older dogs with mobility issues should consider devices such as ramps and steps so their dogs will be confident. "If stairs are an issue, you'll need carpet and have the stairs well lit. Keep their nails trimmed, and if their paws get dry and cracked you can lubricate their pads, which will help them with traction. Keeping their confidence level up will encourage them to stay active."

Guse said that what she does at the clinic is very similar to what physical therapists do with humans, including exercises, treatments with heat and cold, and a water treadmill.

"There are all kinds of things that can be done, and they do so well," she said. "They're just the best patients, and it's pretty amazing what we can do for the old guys." **WHL**

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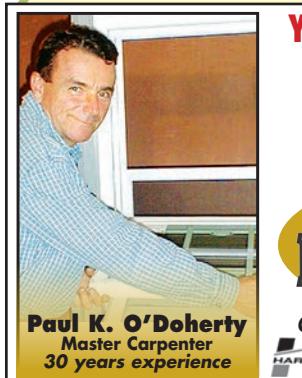
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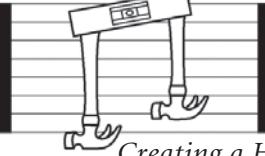
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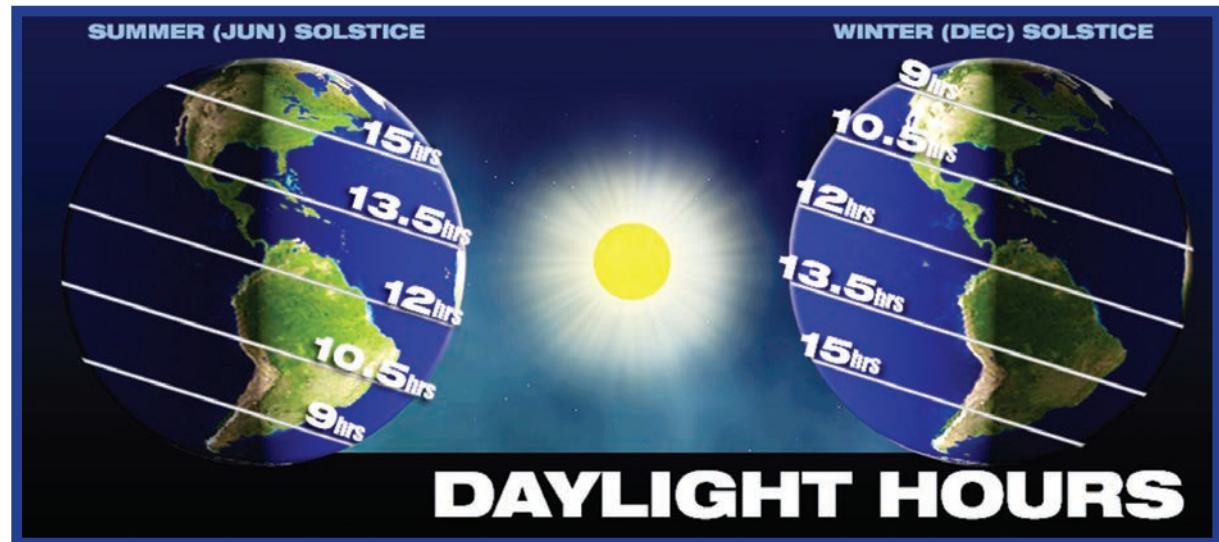
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Savor/Enjoy the Daylight

First, let me just say that I hope everyone reading this article is having a great summer! Speaking of "summer" ... while the "meteorological" season started on June 1st, the "astronomical" season officially kicked off on June 21 (with the solstice). On this date, there is the greatest amount of

possible daylight of the year, 15 hours and 14 minutes to be exact.

On a bright day here in Connecticut during the summertime, many like to get out and enjoy the sunshine – if it's heading to area beaches, a local pool, or a golf course (etc). So, you'll certainly want to savor each and

every minute, since every day past the solstice, as we head toward autumn (and later winter), we lose daylight. But how much?

In this month alone, the loss of daylight is 45 minutes! On July 1, the sunrise is at 5:19 a.m. and then sets at 8:30 p.m. By the end of the month, the sunrise shifts to 5:44 a.m. and then sets

20 minutes earlier, at 8:10 p.m.

So while this article may offer up somewhat depressing news, get out there and have fun ...as we head toward the Autumnal Equinox (on September 22nd), we will lose another 2 hours and 17 minutes. By the winter solstice, our total possible daylight dwindles to 9 hours and 7 minutes! **WHL**

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